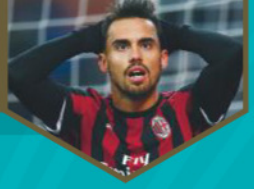
AWARDS SPECIAL | MILAN CRISIS



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January 2018

2018 PREVIEW

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Cristiano Ronaldo

WORLD PLAYER OF THE YEAR

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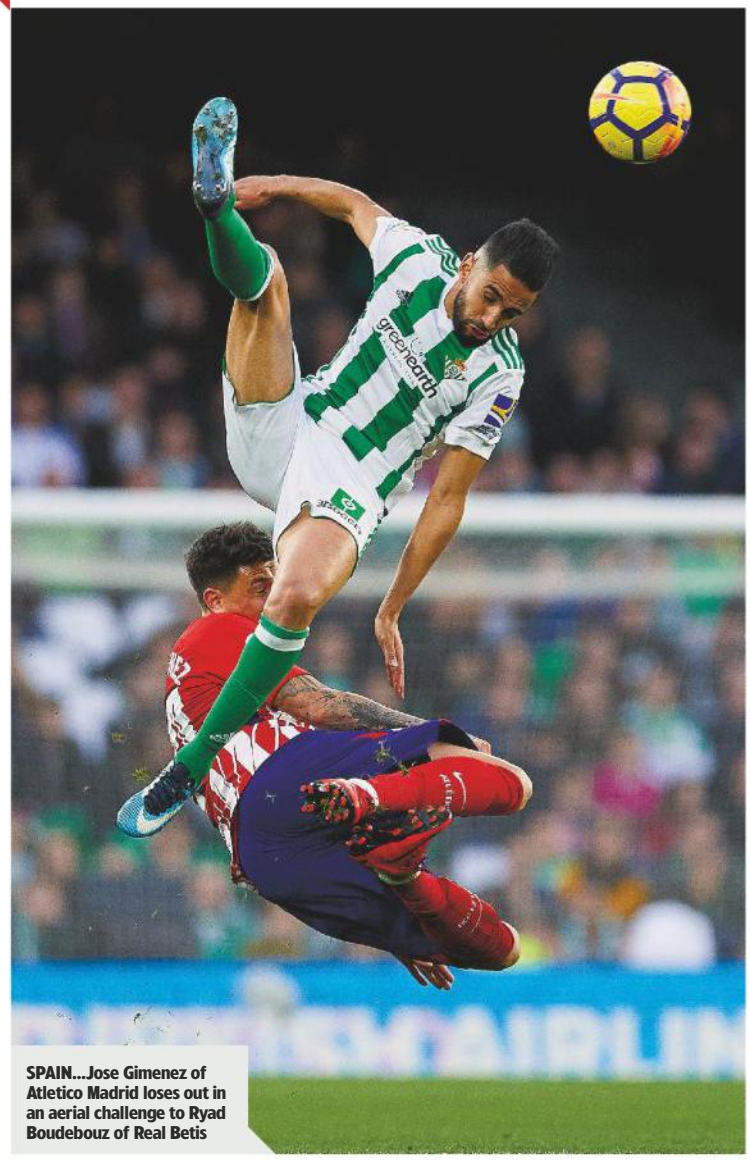

SPAIN...Jose Gimenez of Atletico Madrid loses out in an aerial challenge to Ryad Boudebouz of Real Betis

BELGIUM...Danijel Milicevic of Gent ends up in the snow during a game against Kortrijk

ENGLAND...Stoke City keeper Jack Butland denies Harry Kane of Tottenham Hotspur

FRANCE...Nantes' forward Yacine Bammou celebrates his goal against Nice

AUSTRALIA...lightning strikes as Melbourne Victory play Western Sydney Wanderers in the W-League

URUGUAY...Penarol celebrate beating Defensor to win the championship

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FROM THE EDITOR

Congratulations to Cristiano Ronaldo, *World Soccer*'s World Player of the Year for a record fifth time after his role in Real Madrid's successes over the past 12 months – successes that have rightly earned his club and their coach, Zinedine Zidane, our Team of the Year and Manager of the Year awards.

Amid all the plaudits for Ronaldo, it's easy to overlook Lionel Messi's outstanding performances over the past 12 months: he was the top club scorer in Europe and instrumental in rescuing Argentina's World Cup qualifying campaign.

In the summer, Ronaldo and Messi have a chance to cement their place in history by winning the World Cup. Not all truly great players have triumphed on the biggest stage of all. Pele, Maradona and Zidane did; Cruyff, Platini and Di Stefano did not.

> In the summer, Ronaldo and Messi have a chance to cement their place in history by winning the World Cup

Nevertheless, we are living in extraordinary footballing times. It is unprecedented to have two such brilliant footballers as Ronaldo and Messi at the top of their game for so long. It's hard to see anybody coming close to emulating their achievements for some time.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

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9 Milan fail to live up to pre-season hype ..... page 24
10 Kawasaki win first J.League title ..... page 72

SWITZERLAND

Brazil FA chief Del Nero is banned by FIFA

Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) president Marco Polo del Nero has been banned from all football activity for 90 days by FIFA while he is investigated over possible unethical conduct.

Del Nero, a former member of FIFA's executive committee, was among 42 football officials and sports marketing executives indicted in the United States in 2015 in the FIFAGate corruption scandal.

Brazil does not allow the extradition of its own citizens and Del Nero had remained as president of the CBF.

Del Nero's two immediate predecessors at the CBF, Jose Maria Marin and Ricardo Teixeira, were also among those indicted in the US.

"Now, get out, our patience is at an end"

Milan fans sent a message to goalkeeper Gigio Donnarumma, whose agent hinted he was forced into agreeing a £40m contract extension

FRANCE

Boss Bielsa dismissed by Lille

Lille coach Marcelo Bielsa was suspended and then sacked by the French club for "misconduct" following an unauthorised trip to Chile to visit his former national-team assistant, Luis Bonini, who was battling stomach cancer and subsequently died from the illness.

Lille had struggled to adapt to Bielsa's tactics this season and are battling relegation from Ligue 1.

The 61-year-old former Argentina boss agreed a two-year contract to take charge of the club last summer.

"For now, we are in a legal battle with the club," said Bielsa's lawyer, Carlo Alberto Brusa.

Sacked...Marcelo Bielsa

Banned...Marco Polo del Nero

HEROES & VILLAINS

PEP GUARDIOLA

Following Manchester City's 4-0 win away at Swansea City, their manager now holds the record for consecutive league victories in the Premier League (15), Bundesliga (19, with Bayern Munich) and La Liga (16, Barcelona).

Trio...Pep Guardiola

ESSAM EL HADARY

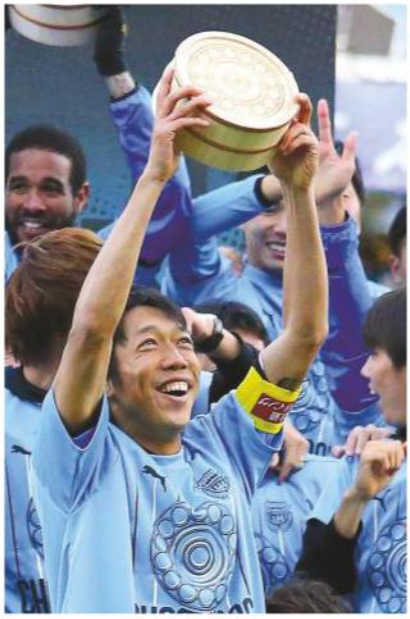
The 45-year-old Al Ahly keeper scored the second goal of his career – a 98th-minute penalty against Al Taawun of Saudi Arabia – 16 years after his first.

JAN OBLAK

The Atletico Madrid and Slovenia goalkeeper launched a charity to help children with special needs in his home town of Skofja Loka.

KENGO NAKAMURA

Eventually won J.League title with Kawasaki Frontale after being a seven-time runner-up.



Eighth wonder...Kengo Nakamura

Ban...Edwin Cardona (right)

EDWIN CARDONA

The Colombia midfielder was banned for five games for making a discriminatory gesture with his eyes towards a South Korean opponent during a friendly in November. He can, however, serve the suspension in non-competitive internationals, so should be available for his country's opening World Cup game, against Japan on June 19.

ROBINHO

Capped 100 times by Brazil and now playing in his homeland for Atletico Mineiro, the 33-year-old was sentenced to nine years in prison for sexual assault. Found guilty of assaulting a woman along with five other men at a nightclub in 2013, when he played for Milan, he has denied the charges and the sentence will not be enforced until an appeal process has been completed – which could take years.

Sentenced...Robinho

SERGIO RAMOS

The Real Madrid defender's red card against Athletic Bilbao was the 19th of his career, setting a new La Liga record. He received a second yellow for leading with an elbow in a challenge on Aritz Aduriz in the 86th minute.

OTAR KITEISHVILI

A missed penalty by Dinamo Tbilisi's skipper in stoppage time of the last game of the season handed the Georgian league title to opponents Torpedo Kutaisi.

"I'm the best player in history, in the good moments and the bad ones. No footballer can do the things I can. There's no player more complete than me"

Cristiano Ronaldo makes a modest declaration

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 ALBERTO BRIGNOLI
Benevento v Milan
The goalkeeper launches himself at a free-kick in the fifth minute of added time to head home an equaliser.

2 MILAN SKRINIAR
Internazionale v Chievo
Runs the length of the field, from his centre-back position, to meet a cross by Antonio Candreva with a diving header.

3 JEFFERSON FARFAN
Lokomotiv Moscow v Zlin
Deftly chips the advancing goalkeeper when through on goal.

4 MAXIMILIANO MEZA
Independiente v Flamengo
Drills home a low volley from the edge of the penalty area, following a superb cross by Ezequiel Barco, in the first leg of the Sudamericana Cup Final.

5 LUIS SUAREZ
Barcelona v Villarreal
"*Tiki-taka*" at its finest sees the Uruguayan link superbly with Lionel Messi and Paco Alcacer before rounding the goalkeeper and tapping home.

6 BRANISLAV IVANOVIC
Zenit v Real Sociedad
Controls the ball well on his chest before producing a spectacular overhead kick into the bottom corner.

WINNERS

CRISTIANO RONALDO
Real Madrid striker became the first player to score in all six of his side's Champions League group games.

ASTANA
In the last 32 of the Europa League, they are the first club from Kazakhstan to reach a European knockout stage.

WEMBLEY STADIUM
Will host an extra four Euro 2020 games after UEFA announced that Brussels' new stadium would not be ready in time.

LOSERS

METZ
Became the first side to lose eight consecutive Ligue 1 games at home.

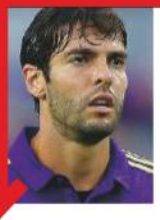
PAOLO GUERRERO
Peru's striker will miss the World Cup after being suspended for a year for testing positive for cocaine.

DANI CARVAJAL
Misses the first leg of Real Madrid's last-16 Champions League tie with a ban for getting deliberately booked.

"I'm really tired when I get home and I don't have the energy to be playing with him all day. I just go in goal"

Real Madrid's Marcelo on his eight-year-old son, Enzo, who plays as a forward for one of the club's junior teams

Headliner: Kaka



End of the road

Brazilian attacker calls time on illustrious career

One of the world's most influential players of the past 15 years, Kaka has announced his retirement at the age of 35 after ending his third season with MLS side Orlando City.

The Brazilian, who was *World Soccer*'s World Player of the Year in 2007 after winning the Champions League with Milan, played 92 times for his country, scoring 29 goals and starring in Brazil's 2009 Confederations Cup triumph.

"I needed time to think and take a very calm decision; very calm and very aware of what I will want for my professional life," he says of his announcement.

"I went to Europe to watch some games, to feel the emotion of the game there, where football really has its highest point. And, very aware, I came to a conclusion that it's time to end my career as a professional footballer."

Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite grew up in a middle-class family in Sao Paulo, the son of an engineer and a primary school teacher. He was reportedly given his nickname by his younger brother, who could not pronounce Ricardo.

Kaka's early performances for his home-town club Sao Paulo earned him a place as a 20-year-old in Brazil's 2002 World Cup squad, but he played only a marginal role behind the team's star trio of Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Rivaldo.

A move to Europe followed a year later, and on joining Milan he played arguably the best football of his career, helping the club to win the 2004 Serie A title and the Champions League in 2007 – a year in which he also collected a host of personal accolades.

A €68million world-record transfer to Real Madrid in 2009 promised much, but although he won La Liga with Jose Mourinho's side in 2011 he was unable to reproduce his best form and returned to Milan on a free transfer in 2013.

After being overlooked for Brazil's squad for the World Cup on home soil in 2014 he moved on once again, and the final chapter in his career took him to the United States, where he became the face of MLS newcomers Orlando City, spending three seasons as the league's highest-paid player.

Following the announcement of his retirement as a player, Kaka posted a picture on social media of himself in a T-shirt with the slogan "I Belong to Jesus", a reference to his evangelical Christian faith. "Father, It was much more than I could ever imagined," he said "Thank you! I'm now ready for the next journey."

In the past he has expressed a wish to train as a priest but says that Milan have made him a proposal to join their back-room staff.

"I would like to take part in a club in a role more like...a manager, a sporting director – someone between the field and the club," he explains.

In addition to Kaka, a number of other exceptional players have announced their retirement in the past year, including Philipp Lahm, Andrea Pirlo, Francesco Totti, Xabi Alonso and Didier Drogba.

Robbie Rogers, the world's only openly gay professional footballer, also called it a day, while Arjen Robben (Holland) and Gianluigi Buffon (Italy) announced their international retirements.

John Holmesdale

In the thick of it...Kaka causes problems for Atlanta United in July at the Orlando City Stadium

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The rise of the goalscoring wide boys

At the start of December, Mohamed Salah was the leading scorer in the Premier League with 12 goals, while Raheem Sterling was joint-third with nine. There are still plenty of centre-forwards who score goals in the English top flight – Harry Kane, Sergio Aguero, Alvaro Morata, Romelu Lukaku – but there appears to be a new stage in a trend that has been developing for perhaps a decade: the emergence of the wide man as less of a traditional winger and more as a goalscorer.

Football has become used to players scoring from wide positions, but for a long time Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi blurred the picture. They are so exceptional as to defy categorisation, scoring from wherever they happen to be in the attacking half of the pitch.

But the notion of the goalscoring wide man is implicit in any system that deploys a false nine. If the goals aren't coming from the central striker, where are they going to come from? The obvious answer is from out wide, from players cutting into space left by the central striker dropping deep, usually coming onto their stronger foot which involves them playing on the "wrong" side: a left-footer on the right and a right-footer on the left.

That creates an immediate issue for the defending side because they face a player coming from an area that is usually protected by a full-back into another that is protected by a central defender. This was something Alex Ferguson outlined in May 2009 when explaining that the benefits of using Ronaldo as a central striker and Wayne Rooney out wide weren't only defensive because Rooney could be relied upon to track his full-back in a way that Ronaldo couldn't.

Prolific...Mohamed Salah of Liverpool

> "When forwards attack from wide to inside they are far more dangerous"
> Alex Ferguson

"When forwards attack from wide to inside they are far more dangerous," explained Ferguson. "It's funny when I see centre-forwards starting off in the middle against their markers and then going away from goal. Strikers going inside are far more dangerous, I think.

"When [Thierry] Henry played as a striker, and sometimes when Wayne does, they try to escape and create space by drifting from the centre to wide positions, when that actually makes them less dangerous."

Henry is a slightly different case as his power and athleticism allowed him to work out to the flanks from a nominal central position, but the general principle remains: the impact of attacking on a diagonal.

Any player whose game is based on running needs acceleration room in front of him. A player who gets a run at a defender so he is moving at pace when a challenge is made is always going to be more dangerous than one who starts tight up against him.

That's why the traditional winger, in the Stanley Matthews image, was effectively taken out of the game by the development of the back four from the late fifties. The extra defender meant that the left-back didn't have to tuck in to offer cover when the ball was on the opposing wing, leaving his winger untended. If the wide man is looking always to come inside, though, to attack the full-back on his weaker foot so he is moving at speed by the time he hits the centre-back, he has effectively created more acceleration room for himself in the same space.

But Salah's role isn't even like that of, say, Riyad Mahrez, Arjen Robben or John Barnes. He is much more of a striker than any of them, constantly arriving late in the box, attacking the back post, looking for rebounds.

There is a parallel with ex-Liverpool striker Ryan Babel who also operates on the "wrong" side in a 4-3-3 and is thriving this season at Besiktas in a front three, with the Portuguese right-winger Ricardo Quaresma and the mobile Cenk Tosun. "When the ball's on the right we

Thriving...Ryan Babel (right) with Cenk Tosun at Besiktas

know Ricardo can cross so I always try to tuck in on time to join Cenk in the box," says Babel. "On my side it's a different type of creativity. I come inside, I go outside, I play together with my full-back."

Babel came through at Ajax as a centre-forward before being shifted to the left, first by Ronald Koeman and then, at Liverpool, by Rafa Benitez. He makes little secret of the fact he still feels his natural game is to be a striker but, having turned 31 in December, he is reconciled to the fact that he is now regarded as a left-sided player. But under Senol Gunes at Besiktas he has found a role that suits him. Like Salah, he specialises not just in cutting inside, but also in sniffing at the back post, attacking crosses and picking up any loose balls after Cenk has made an initial challenge.

Much modern tactical thought is based around the generation of space. There is still a place for more traditional players such as Morata and Lukaku but there is a greater variety in style of forward than ever before. Pep Guardiola talks of "arrivals" in the box. In other words it's not about a player always being there but being there at the right time. The capacity to time his runs has been a notable improvement in Sterling's game this season.

Similarly, those sides playing 3-4-2-1 have found the benefit of what are essentially inside-forwards who have the option of attacking from slightly wider than would be expected. As well as Salah, Arsenal's Alexis Sanchez and Richarlison of Watford, both of whom like to start left and drift infield, were in the top six for shots per game in the Premier League at the beginning of December. As the search for space goes on, it is increasingly to be found coming inside from out wide. WS

Improvement... Manchester City's Raheem Sterling (right)

JANN-FIETE ARP (Hamburg)

The Germany under-17 striker is attracting interest from Europe's leading clubs after becoming Hamburg's youngest-ever debutant and the first player born in the 21st century to score a goal in the Bundesliga.

YANN BISSECK (Cologne)
Standing 6ft 4in at the age of 16 years and 362 days, the centre-back became the second youngest player in Bundesliga history (after Nuri Sahin) when making his debut against Hertha Berlin.

OMAR KHRIBIN (Al Hilal)
The 23-year-old Syria forward was named the AFC's Player of the Year after an exceptional 12 months in which he starred in his country's run to the World Cup qualifying play-offs and his club's appearance in the Asian Champions League Final.

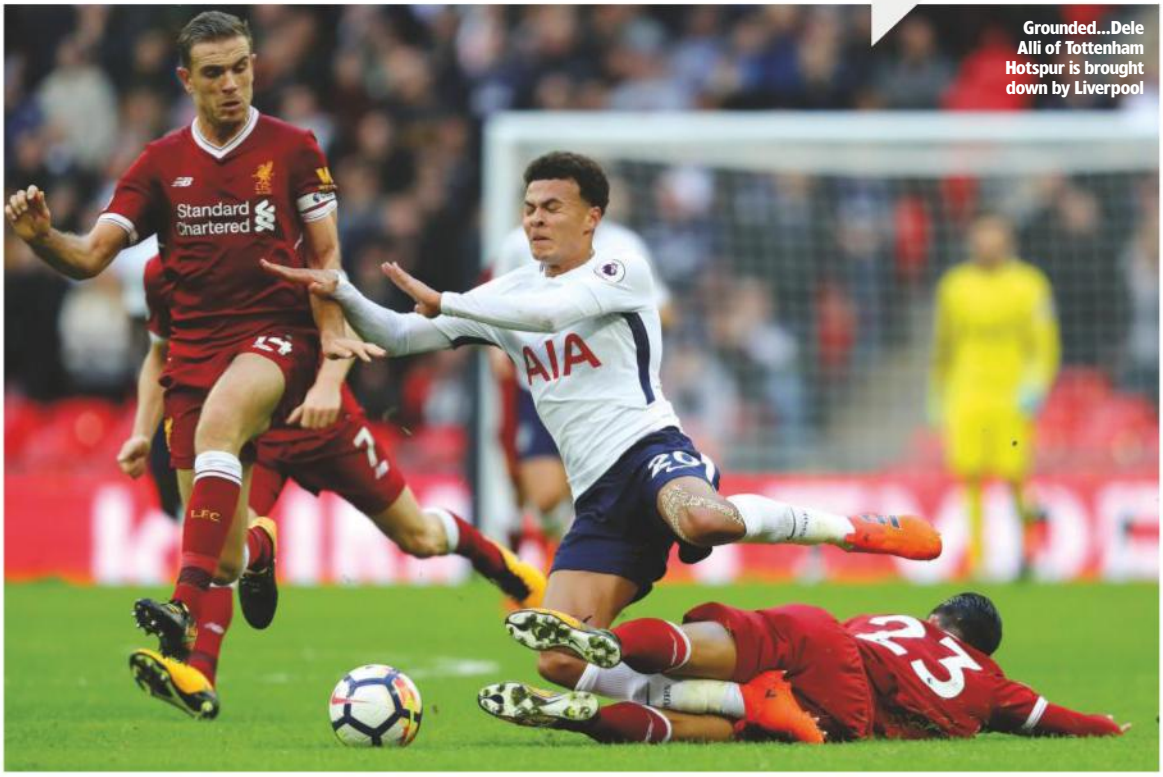
KWASI OKYERE WRIEDT (Bayern Munich)
On making his Bundesliga debut for Bayern, away at Borussia Monchengladbach, the 23-year-old Ghanaian striker became only the second African player to play for the club, after compatriot Sammy Kuffour.

JUSTIN KLUIVERT (Ajax)
The 18-year-old scored an Eredivisie hat-trick in a 5-1 victory over Roda JC – a feat that even his famous father, former Holland and Barcelona striker Patrick Kluivert, never managed during his career in the Dutch league with Ajax and PSV.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

The myth of "going down too easily"



Grounded...Dele Alli of Tottenham Hotspur is brought down by Liverpool

A favourite cliche of British TV gurus is "he went down too easily". And it is a cliche that the gurus bring up too easily.

There is bias at work here; my own, for a start. I'm talking here strictly about the attitude of EPL commentators, so it's hardly a global look at "going down too easily" – let's call it GDTE, for simplicity's sake. But it is one that makes sense because, as I see it, it is the Brits who are most attached to the GDTE accusation.

Many of the gurus were defenders in their playing days and therefore seem evidently eager to make excuses for the younger defenders they are supposed to be analysing. Any sort of slam-bang tackle is likely to get praised – with accompanying mutterings about the good old days – even when the tackle is obviously late or high.

Any damage to the opposing player is minimised, even belittled, with comments such as "the tackle's a little bit late, just caught him", implying the any seemingly slight contact is in fact harmless. They also repeatedly insist everything is fine as "there was no intent, it wasn't malicious" – evidently unaware that the rules make no mention of intent.

That notion – that physical fouls have to be intentional or they are not fouls – was taken out of the rule book in 1994, making the gurus some 23 years behind the times.

But the main thrust of their argument is that there is something wimpish about being knocked to the ground. Players should stay on their feet unless they receive an almighty wallop. Then it's alright to go down, but woe betide them if they roll over or look "theatrical" as they fall.

Because they relish the thought of crunching-contact tackles, the GDTE crowd cannot stand the idea that slight contact can send a player sprawling. But if a defenders' feet – or a goalkeepers' hands – make contact with an opponents' moving legs it is enough to unbalance the victim and their running motion will then send the player to the ground. The trip may be unintentional, but it is still a foul.

> Rugby and gridiron football and wrestling are contact sports...the rules allow it, indeed, contact is at the heart of those sports. Football is not like that

But that is just not acceptable to GDTE people. They offer what they see as the clinching argument for their crude macho version of football: "Football's a contact sport."

Hogwash. Rugby and gridiron football and wrestling are contact sports, where the participants spend

all their time applying and resisting contact, often pretty violent contact. The rules allow it, indeed, contact is at the heart of those sports.

Of course there is contact in football, but it is incidental contact. Footballers who play the game looking all the time for contact are subverting both the spirit and the rules of the sport.

The game is under threat all the time from the GDTE mob, and I suspect an English tradition lurks here: that appealing phrase "hard but fair", the clattering tackle that won the ball and "cleaned out" the opponent at the same time.

As part of its revisions, the 1994 rulebook added a specific warning to players who "when tackling an opponent make contact with the opponent before contact is made with the ball". So the days of the clean-out tackle were numbered – provided referees could, in the hectic whirl of feet, legs and ball, decide who touched what first.

The new clause, ignored as often as it was applied, lived on for 15 years until, in 2008, it quietly disappeared from the rule book. And no one, apparently, complained.

So that is where we are. Scything through an opponent's legs to get at the ball is, it would seem, just fine –provided it's not careless.

So fouls are not called, players are booked for non-existent diving, and TV gurus continue to serve up their toxic brew of pro-defence bias.

Does that sound like anything that is helping the growth of intelligent, skilful football? WS

Judgement...referee Anthony Taylor

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

1 WHY THE LONG FACE?

Former England striker Michael Owen finished second on his debut as a jockey in a charity horse race at Ascot.

The 37-year-old rode Calder Prince in a seven-furlong Flat race, finishing behind Golden Wedding.

"I'm home in one piece and had the time of my life," said Owen who breeds and owns racehorses but only got in the saddle for the first time in 2017.

Second... Michael Owen

Missing... Messi's statue is vandalised

2 MESSI STATUE VANDALISED AGAIN

A statue of Lionel Messi on the "walk of fame" in Buenos Aires has been severely vandalised.

It is the second time since the unveiling of the statue in 2016 that this has happened. This time the Argentinian hero was cut off at the ankles, just leaving the cast of his boot chasing the football on the plinth while the severed body was pushed to the ground and left lying there.

It is unclear, what, if any, the motive was.

Dismissed... Marius Wolf sees red

3 OFF...AND THEN BACK ON AGAIN

Eintracht Frankfurt's Marius Wolf was sent off during a 1-0 loss to Bayern Munich with just under 20 minutes remaining. But referee Harm Osmers changed his mind after consulting video replays.

"I was in the changing room already," explains the midfielder.

"Then the team manager came and called me back, said the referee was looking at video evidence. I also said he should do that. For me, it was not a red card."

Dieing trade...a Monterrey coffin

4 MONTERREY TIL I DIE

A funeral directors in Monterrey came up with a novel way to drum up business by selling coffins in the colours of the two teams contesting the Mexican Liga MX title.

Monterrey and Tigres coffins were available for $500 each to bury loved ones.

And there may have been an increase in demand for the blue Monterrey version after Tigres won 3-2 to secure the title...

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

A solution to detoxify FIFA: change the name

Patrick Nally knows more about World Cup business than anyone else in the game. He was the original "super salesman" who devised the sponsor/broadcasting exclusivity matrix for FIFA in the late 1970s and it is the formula commonplace now for everything from sports events to conferences and concerts.

Nally has since watched with increasing despair as his brainchild has been battered by officials who saw the opportunity to feather the nests of both their sports and their own personal lifestyles.

The world football federation has weathered its full share of crises down the years, from the savings losses after the Wall Street crash to the collapse of commercial partner ISL nearly 20 years ago and on to the endless nightmare of the tainted World Cup votes for 2006, 2010, 2018 and 2022.

Now the revelations in the FIFAGate trial of old CONMEBOL conspirators Jose Maria Marin, Juan Angel Napout and Manuel Burga in New York have revealed the further labyrinthine depths into which FIFA's acquiescent leadership allowed it to sink down the decades.

Meeting...FIFA council in Zurich

> "Having become so toxic and synonymous with corruption, the only way for FIFA to recover will be to change the brand"
>
> Sports marketeer, Patrick Nally

Current president Gianni Infantino could have taken significant steps to drive FIFA upward, but he turned hesitant progress around by purging the once-independent leadership of the ethics and governance committees by arranging for the lemmings of congress to sack Hans-Joachim Eckert, Cornel Bobely and Miguel Maduro.

Super salesman... Patrick Nally

This has just prompted a scathing take-down of FIFA governance by Anne Brasseur to the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Council, of which she is a former president.

Brasseur's criticism – she did praise FIFA for bringing human-rights issues into its World Cup award analyses – was followed up by Mark Pieth, who kicked off the reform process reluctantly launched by Sepp Blatter back in 2011.

Reviewing not only the reform reversal but FIFA's cosy relationship with Russia's Vitaly Mutko in the wake of the Olympic doping scandal, Pieth thought that "FIFA has become a joke".

While different individuals may have their own personal agendas, what remains indisputable is that FIFA has failed to attract any new A-list sponsor for the World Cup. Nally ascribes that to a commercial imperative to avoid association with the tarnished FIFA brand.

The only answer, in Nally's opinion, is for FIFA to abandon its past, explaining: "Having become so toxic and synonymous with corruption, the only way for FIFA to recover will be to change the brand."

Changing the name, from Federation Internationale de Football Association, would be only a start and is an increasing trend. In a business landscape where English is the common language, the old French titles of the traditional governing bodies do not speak to today's commercial reality. FILA (Federation Internationale des Luttes Associees), for example, changed its name to United World Wrestling among reforms which rescued that sport from Olympic exclusion, while FISA (Federation Internationale des Societes d'Aviron) has become World Rowing to step up the pursuit of sponsorship.

For FIFA a name change might be difficult as the popularity of the sport means that just about every possible anglicised title or label has long been appropriated elsewhere.

World Soccer back in 1960, to take just one example...

Novel idea is nothing new

The USA, Canada and Mexico are odds-on to land host rights to the 2026 World Cup when FIFA Congress casts its votes in June.

The three-way co-hosting idea has also been taken up in South America, where Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay are preparing a bid for the centenary finals in 2030. Montevideo, presumably, would stage the Final, though a vast renovation of the Estadio Centenario would be necessary for a repeat of the 1930 showdown.

However, the idea of triple hosting is not new. FIFA president Jules Rimet had proposed a co-hosting of the 1938 finals between France, Belgium and Holland.

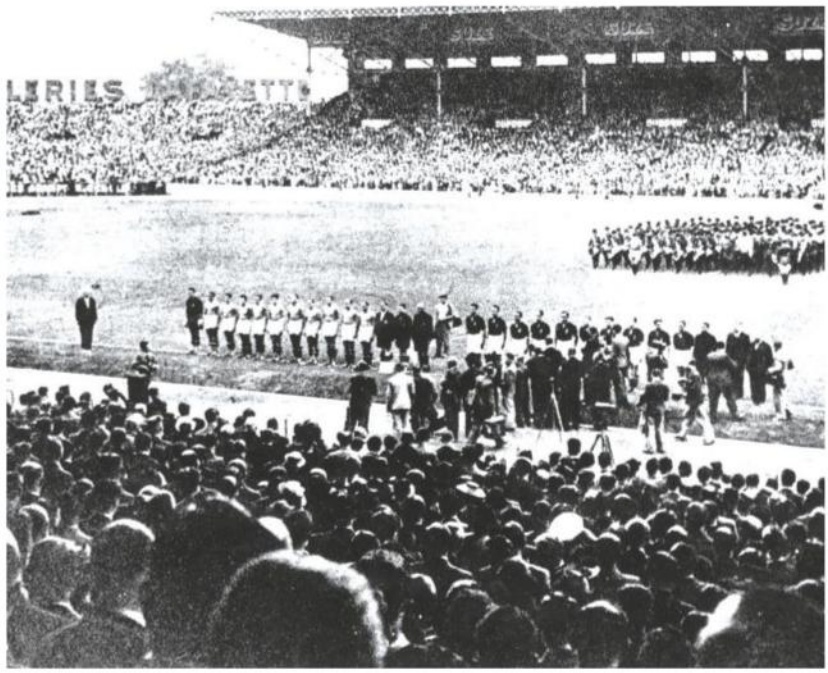
Rimet had wanted his own French nation to welcome the world but his home establishment did not share his enthusiasm. Not, that is, until Rimet suggested that France share the glory with its Channel-coast neighbours. Once they realised he was serious in sharing the glory, the French came up with the goods including an upgrade to the Stade Colombes to host what proved the last Final before the outbreak of war.

As for the 2026 finals, Morocco is the only other contender and an unlikely one for the first expanded 48-team tournament. Insiders who have viewed Morocco's plans have expressed positive surprise but it is questionable whether they will survive the technical assessment.

Many FIFA Council members and congress delegates will be relieved if asked only to reward the US, Canada and Mexico by acclamation: president Gianni Infantino has laid down that everyone's vote must be open to public scrutiny.

Transparency in a FIFA World Cup vote? Who wants that?

Final...Italy and Hungary in 1938



Victim Villar

Angel Maria Villar, suspended former long-time president of the Spanish federation, and vice-president of FIFA and UEFA, complains that he has been treated "like a leper" since his arrest on corruption charges.

Villar might have gained a more sympathetic hearing had he not, down the years, avoided the media like, well, the plague.

New member... Henning Jensen in action for Borussia Monchengladbach

The Three v The Six

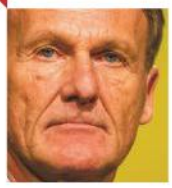
Henning Jensen, who has died at the age of 68, held a particular place in the tortured history of Britain and the European Union.

An elusive centre-forward or winger, Jensen was a Danish representative in a New Members team (UK, Denmark and the Irish Republic) that played a "welcome" match against a Common Market side at Wembley on January 3, 1973. The match was part of a Fanfare For Europe week.

Jensen played 21 times for Denmark while with Borussia Monchengladbach, winning the Bundesliga in 1975 and 1976 as well as the German Cup in 1973 and the UEFA Cup in 1975.

He also had spells playing for Real Madrid, Ajax, Aarhus and Norresundby.

As for the match, old rivals Alf Ramsey and Helmut Schon were the managers as The Three beat The Six by 2-0. Jensen and Colin Stein scored the goals in front of a mere 36,500 – a sign that enthusiasm was underwhelming back then, too.



"While we were winning, I never had a secure feeling. It was always fragile"

Borussia Dortmund CEO, Hans-Joachim Watzke (left) on why Peter Bosz was sacked

Headliner: Peter Stoger

BVB's new boss

Austrian lands Dortmund job after Bosz sacking

Desperate times call for desperate measures. How else to describe Borussia Dortmund's decision to sack Dutch coach Peter Bosz, who had not won in the Bundesliga since late September, and replace him with Peter Stoger, who prior to being axed by Cologne a matter of days earlier, had picked up just two points from the first 13 games of the season?

Bosz, whose last game in charge was a 2-1 capitulation at lowly Werder Bremen, simply ran out of road and time. Dortmund set themselves the highest of standards and a disastrous streak of just one win in 14 competitive fixtures was bound to signal doomsday.

Only appointed in the summer, Bosz's reign at the Westfalenstadion began most impressively as his team ripped apart opponents with their bravura attacking to go five points clear at the top of the table after seven rounds.

Then came the dramatic disintegration; the abrupt loss of form of chief striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang; the shoddy defending; the all-conquering spirit suddenly morphing into dread and hesitancy.

The net result? Disappointment across the board, with elimination from the Champions League, after failing to win a single game in the group phase, and no end of dropped points in the Bundesliga, leaving them marooned in eighth place, a colossal 13 points behind leaders Bayern Munich and five adrift of second-place RB Leipzig in second place before Stoger's arrival.

> Is he in the right frame of mind for any coaching post, let alone one as challenging as that which awaits him in Dortmund?

What essentially sealed Bosz's fate was his tunnel vision, his determination for the team to always be on the front foot. As long as Dortmund were throwing men forward in ever-increasing numbers, he was happy, seemingly oblivious to their vulnerability at the back.

That the Dortmunder see Stoger – who was handed a six-month contract – as their saviour has left many perplexed. Yes, the Austrian achieved a great deal in his four-and-half-years in Cologne, notably masterminding their promotion to the Bundesliga in 2014 and securing Europa League qualification last season – the club's first taste of continental action in 25 years. But, undoubtedly, he has had his reputation tarnished by their flat lining form this term.

No team in Bundesliga history has ever started a campaign so abysmally. And unable to spark the merest hint of a revival, Stoger looked a beaten man before the axe finally fell. Questions inevitably have to be asked if he is in the right frame of mind for any coaching post, let alone one as challenging as that which awaits him in Dortmund.

The harsh fact is that he has suffered even more defeats of late than the *Dortmunder*. Is a coach low in confidence himself, really the best candidate to instil belief in a faltering outfit?

Needless to say, the Dortmund top brass – CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke and general manager Michael Zorc – see Stoger's arrival in a completely different light. Both are long-standing admirers of the Austrian's ability to organise and solidify and arguably that's exactly what the *Schwarz-Gelben* need right now.

Watzke and Zorc are not expecting Stoger to perform miracles. Just to steady the ship and buy them some time.

Nothing more than that.

Nick Bidwell

New man...in charge against Mainz

OBITUARY

Benjamin MASSING
(1952-2017)
Combative centre-back who appeared for Cameroon at the 1990 World Cup and was sent off for a brutal foul on Argentina forward Claudio Canniggia in the tournament's opening match. He also played in the quarter-finals and was booked for a foul on Gary Lineker which led to a penalty for England.

"God took his time but never forgot"

Milan striker Carlos Bacca (right) on the sacking of the coach Vincenzo Montella, who he fell out with last season

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

Back...Sam Allardyce

EUROPE

Juventus confirmed they will pay the agreed €46million to turn Brazil winger **DOUGLAS COSTA**'s loan deal from Bayern Munich into a permanent move in July.

Former England boss **SAM ALLARDYCE** took charge at Everton, while **ALAN PARDEW** replaced Tony Pulis at West Bromwich Albion.

ABELARDO FERNANDEZ replaced Gianni De Biasi as coach of La Liga strugglers Alaves.

Barcelona's director of football **RAUL SANLLEHI** will join Arsenal as head of football relations in February. Former Chelsea technical director **MICHAEL EMENALO** joined Monaco as sporting director.

TOMAZ KAVCIC replaced Srecko Katanec as coach of Slovenia.

Rapid move... Anthony Hudson

CONCACAF

ANTHONY HUDSON, who guided New Zealand to an intercontinental World Cup play-off in November, was appointed coach of MLS side Colorado Rapids.

DIEGO COCCA, who led Racing to the Argentinian championship in 2014, was appointed coach of Mexican club Tijuana.

ASIA

JUAN ANTONIO PIZZI will lead Saudi Arabia at the World Cup after the sacking of Edgardo Bauza.

LI XIAOPENG replaced Felix Magath as coach of Chinese Super League side Shandong Luneng.

TAN CHENG-HOE replaced Nelo Vingada as coach of Malaysia.

World Cup date...Juan Antonio Pizzi

Milan man... Gennaro Gattuso

Rino takes charge

GENNARO GATTUSO, who won the Champions League twice while a player with Milan, took over from Vincenzo Montella as the Serie A side's coach. **GIUSEPPE IACHINI** replaced Cristian Bucchi in charge of Sassuolo.

OUT

EUROPE

Cologne parted company with coach **PETER STOGER** after failing to win any of their opening 14 games in the Bundesliga.

Crotone coach **DAVIDE NICOLA**, who led the club to Serie A safety last season, resigned.

Struggling La Liga side Las Palmas sacked **PAKO AYESTARAN**.

Ex-Brazil keeper **JULIO CESAR**, 38, had his contract with Benfica cancelled by mutual consent.

Russian boss **LEONID SLUTSKY** left Hull City by mutual consent following the Championship side's disappointing form.

Manchester City midfielder **SINAN BYTYQI**, who was in Kosovo's squad during their World Cup qualifying campaign, was forced to retire with a heart condition at 22.

CONCACAF

Spanish coach **PACO JEMEZ** parted company with Cruz Azul after they lost in the Liga MX Apertura quarter-finals.

ASIA

ANDRE VILLAS-BOAS left his position as coach of Chinese club Shanghai SIPG.

Australia's record goalscorer **TIM CAHILL** quit A-League side Melbourne City in search of more game time ahead of the World Cup.

AFRICA

Cameroon sacked coach **HUGO BROOS** less than a year after he won the African Nations Cup.

Off...Andre Villas-Boas

Gone...Juan Manuel Lillo

Lillo leaves Nacional

Spanish coach **JUAN MANUEL LILLO** stepped down as Atletico Nacional coach after less than a year in charge. Nacional were eliminated from the Colombian clausura after losing on penalties to Tolima in the quarter-final play-offs.

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Southgate does not deserve FA indulgence

If Belgium fully express their great talents, if Eden Hazard and Kevin De Bruyne strike form on the day, I cannot see the England defence resisting them in the World Cup. They are beyond doubt the star figures in a talented Belgian side, but there are several other accomplished players in the squad, and Christian Benteke on his day can be a menace in the air.

For reasons which utterly elude me, the FA has assured Gareth Southgate that whatever England's results in Russia he will remain in charge of the team.

All being well, though it is however unlikely, England will have an impressive run in Russia. But if they don't, how can a decision on Southgate's future possibly be taken before a ball in the World Cup finals is even kicked?

As things stand, I cannot see that Southgate's current record entitles him to such indulgence. True, recent friendly goalless draws at Wembley against such powerful opponents as Germany and Brazil were encouraging, all the more so that England were without so many first-choice players.

But before that, in the World Cup qualifiers, we had been subjected to several embarrassingly drab displays, making such surprisingly heavy work in what seemed a far from demanding group.

Summer showdown... Southgate with Belgium coach Roberto Martinez

Infantino, another disaster in Zurich

He may not have been charged with any kind of corruption, but after all those years working under Michel Platini, Gianni Infantino can hardly be called a breath of fresh air – a commodity which has long been hard to find at FIFA.

But when you recall Joao Havelange remained as president for 24 years, where does the ultimate blame lie?

For evil to triumph, said the 18th-century political philosopher Edmund Burke, it is enough for good men to do nothing. And nothing, in all those tarnished years, is what they did.

Now the very Council of Europe has condemned the appointment to the role of FIFA ethics investigator of one Maria Claudia Rojas, who speaks neither English nor French. Nor, as the Council pointed out, has she any experience of either criminal or financial investigations.

Infantino, who has already decided to bloat ensuing World Cup finals to ludicrous sizes, seems week by embarrassing week to be another disastrous FIFA president.

> After all those years working under Michel Platini, Gianni Infantino can hardly be called a breath of fresh air

Blanchflower's tragic end

The many sad stories of footballers cursed with dementia, as a result of heading the ball, reminds me of a sad, strange evening long ago with Danny Blanchflower, who in his time was not only such an accomplished footballer, inspirational skipper of Northern Ireland and Spurs, but a talented writer as well.

Myself and journalist Ken Jones had been flown up to Glasgow to make a television pilot for a possible show, and both Ken and I were reconciled to the verbal dominance of Danny, who would make much the most of the running.

In the event, he was strangely incoherent, often and quite untypically cursing. There was no way any series could be even thought of. Afterwards, he told us that a plank had fallen on his head, which we accepted at the time.

It transpired, that the once supremely fluent footballer had succumbed to an early attack of dementia.

Ask not for whom the bell tolls. I still believe that the only way to cut out a problem which has affected such champions as Ray Wilson, Nobby Stiles and Martin Peters is to ban heading altogether.

Accomplished... Danny Blanchflower

Taylor book reworks history and glosses over his England mistakes

Graham Taylor has had published a posthumous and ghosted autobiography in which he clearly aims to make an exercise in self-justification. That every English league match was preceded by a Saturday afternoon happy-clappy session to observe his death seemed strange to me, and indeed still does. It never happened to Alf Ramsey or Bobby Moore, World Cup winners.

At Vicarage Road, Watford, you could see the logic of it. He had spectacularly taken them from the Fourth Division all the way to runners-up in League and FA Cup. His methods may have been controversial, based on the remote long ball theories of Charles Reap (whom he used as his advisor then abruptly ditched), but the tactical change to the English game was plain enough.

After a spell at Aston Villa – where he is reported to have discouraged a young player from revealing he had been a victim of a club paedophile – he was surprisingly made manager of England, after which things quickly went awry.

In a qualifying game against Ireland in Dublin he ditched the unquestioned star of England's team, Paul Gascoigne, on the grounds that the ball would often be in the air given the Irish tactics. He replaced him with Gordon Cowans, who was even shorter than Gazza.

His selections and his tactics were consistently bizarre. He did manage to take England to the 1992 European finals in Sweden, but when England had to play the Swedes, and were losing 2-1, he mysteriously pulled off Gary Lineker, who was within a goal of an all-time England scoring record, putting in his place Alan Smith to hold the ball up, as he said at the time, when attack was paramount.

In this autobiography he tells a different story, saying that England were unable to make chances for Lineker, who he had been severely critical of after a friendly against Brazil.

After the defeat, he blamed it on Sweden's physical superiority. I suggested that the turning point was the two first-half chances missed by Tony Daley.

Unhappy...Graham Taylor (left) on the sidelines in Holland

> His selections and his tactics were consistently bizarre

His strategic nadir was surely reached when in Oslo, in May 1993, England met Norway in a World Cup qualifier.

Taylor managed to perplex himself into a quandary over how to counter the burly Jostein Flo, a centre-forward who was playing on the right flank. Taylor's arcane answer to this was to play with an extra centre-back, deputing the big, heavy centre-half Gary Pallister to mark Flo at left-back. It all too predictably came to pieces.

An unbalanced England were beaten 2-0 and though they put up a bright display in Holland – Taylor on the bench emitting on a TV documentary the words "Do I not like that" – England lost and were out of the competition.

There are no winners in the Sampson-Ashworth case

Many years ago, when Don Revie brought a High Court case against the FA to be paid what he said was owed to him as England manager – a job he had secretively quit for money elsewhere – he won because Professor Sir Harold Thompson took it upon himself to act as both judge and jury. Mr Justice Cantley called Revie greedy and dishonest, but reluctantly gave judgment in his favour.

Memory of this sorry affair returned to me over what might now be described as the Sampson-Ashworth case; one which yet again shows up the FA hierarchy as grievously inept.

Mark Sampson, though he has so controversially lost his job as coach to a highly successful England women's team, may on occasion have used slightly tactless language to his female players, one of whom, the talented Eni Aluko, had reacted furiously after being dropped and in her view insulted.

True, some time earlier Sampson had had his problems when coaching women in Bristol, but they were not of sufficient gravity to prevent his appointment as manager of the England team.

Unpublished by the FA was Dan Ashworth's assertion that in 20 years of professional football, he had found few environments better than Sampson's.

Which did not stop him acting in Sampson's case as both judge and witness, declaring pompously: "I'm a man of high values and morals, of professional integrity." This to the senior lawyer Katherine Newton who twice investigated the case.

Controversy...Dan Ashworth (left) and Mark Sampson

The first of the reports certainly does not impugn Sampson in any way. Martin Glenn, a deeply unimpressive chief executive of the FA, had to hark back to Sampson's experiences when coaching in Bristol to finds grounds for dismissing him, speaking of the FA's "new standards", whatever they may be.

"My integrity, values, professional standing would mean I can separate my personal views from my professional role," declared Ashworth. But the double role he played in this affair can hardly be defended.

And while Aluko, who clearly and angrily believed that she had been thrust aside, will hardly be assuaged, Sampson seems a thoroughly unfortunate victim.

● Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

LONG ROAD BACK TO THE TOP

By Paddy Agnew

The ambitious rebuilding plans of Milan's new Chinese owner have come unstuck this season

When Milan's players, directors and club officials gathered in December for the club's traditional Christmas dinner in its ultra-modern Casa Milan headquarters, the festive spirit may well have been somewhat mixed.

On the one hand, a 2-1 home win over Bologna the previous evening – the first under new coach Gennaro Gattuso – represented welcome good news. On the other, as Milan head into the new year, there would appear to be some serious hurdles on the road ahead.

The point is that, eight months after the sale of the club to a consortium controlled by Chinese entrepreneur Li Yonghong, the much heralded "climb back to the top of the world", as indicated at the time by the new owner, is proving difficult.

Against a background of disappointing results, the sacking of previous coach Vincenzo Montella and potential UEFA sanctions, media reports suggest that Milan will enter 2018 either looking for new investors or trying to refinance the high-interest loan that their new chairman contracted in order to splash out €740million for the club in April.

When media tycoon and former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi decided to sell his favourite piece of family jewellery to Li Yonghong, many wondered just how this would shake down. During his 30-year ownership of Milan, Berlusconi presided over a golden era in which the team won five European Cup/Champions League titles and were arguably the strongest club side in world football.

In recent times, Milan have been overtaken on the European stage by English, Spanish and German clubs. Their last European success came in the 2007 Champions League, while their last Serie A title win came in the 2011 season.

Initially the signs of a return to those more successful times were encouraging, with €220m invested in the transfer market on stellar names that included Italian defensive icon Leonardo Bonucci (€42m, Juventus), Portuguese striker Andre Silva (€38m, Porto), Ivorian midfielder Franck Kessie (€28m, Atalanta), Turkish midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu (€24m, Bayer Leverkusen) and Argentinian midfielder Lucas Biglia (€17m, Lazio).

The new management, meanwhile, also opted to retain Montella as coach, with the former Catania, Fiorentina and Sampdoria boss being widely perceived as a major talent of the future, having led Milan to sixth place and a Europa League spot last season.

The first indication that this transfer activity might not be the answer to all the club's problems came before the season had even begun.

It was Roma's Boston-based president James Pallotta who first asked some awkward questions. Expressing his dismay that UEFA had put a financial fairplay investigation into Milan on hold, he told Reuters: "I'm so upset at UEFA. It's a joke, it's crazy. It makes no sense. They [Milan] don't have the money."

Struggling...Frank Kessie (centre) and Milan are held to a draw by Torino

Furthermore, Pallotta pointed out how the US private equity fund Elliott had crucially provided €308m to enable the Chinese-led consortium to clinch the purchase deal. Pallotta suggested that, sooner or later, Elliott – which is run by his good friend Paul Singer – will "own the team; they have the debt".

Although Milan CEO Marco Fassone immediately dismissed the comments from Pallotta, arguing that Milan had plenty of "financial leverage", the American's observations were nonetheless unusual and maybe the fruit of more than just traditional club rivalry.

Further alarm bells about the new-look Milan rang out early in the season when they were soundly beaten 4-1 away to Lazio. A hat-trick of defeats in September/October at the hands

Owner...Li Yonghong

of Sampdoria, Roma and, most painfully, Internazionale in the Milanese derby seemed to confirm the opinion of many: namely, that to go out and buy 10 new players does not guarantee world-class success, at least not immediately.

After further defeats by Juventus and Napoli, a goalless home draw with Torino at the end of November proved fatal to Montella, who was sacked the next day. In came Gattuso – the winner of two Champions League trophies with Milan, as well as the 2006 World Cup with Italy – but the misery did not end there.

In his first game in charge, against bottom team Benevento, Milan suffered a humiliating 2-2 draw as Benevento goalkeeper Alberto Brignoli headed home a 95th-minute corner kick to end his club's run of 14 consecutive defeats and earn a first point of the season.

Nor was Milan's next outing any better, going down 2-0 away to Croatian club Rijeka, even if the Europa League tie was relatively meaningless as Milan had already won the group.

Happier times...the 2007 Champions League winners

So what has gone wrong? Firstly, there is that summer spending. Milan bought a lot of good players – but did their shopping include genuine, charismatic, world-class talent?

Bonucci's acquisition was impressive, but he's had a mixed start and was even sent off against Genoa in October. Was he given too much responsibility by being made captain, the implication being that he would be able to single-handedly put the ship to rights?

In some senses, Milan's delight at having landed the defensive icon suggested that the club had put one over on rivals Juventus. However, no longer playing in an ultra-stable, organised Juve defence alongside Andrea Barzagli and Giorgio Chiellini, Bonucci is yet to turn any water into wine. Furthermore, given his obvious tensions with Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri, they may not have been all that upset about his departure.

There are other transfer questions, too. How come Biglia has shown nothing like the form which distinguished his four seasons with Lazio? Has the talented Silva, used more in the Europa League (eight goals) than in Serie A (no goals), lost confidence? Is the manifest failure

Confidence...Andre Silva takes on city rivals Internazionale

of Calhanoglu to find his best form further evidence of a generally disheartened Milan dressing room?

And then there is the argument that the new-look Milan has distanced itself from its own traditions and its most famous sons. Could a role not have been found for such a charismatic figure as Paolo Maldini, a symbol of those past glory years? Milan fans also point out, without much enthusiasm, that two of the key figures in the summer-market moves, namely Fassone and sports director Massimiliano Mirabelli, both arrived from Inter, where they were respectively director general and chief scout.

Then there is the consideration that Gattuso believes he has inherited a less than fully fit squad, something which could account for a number of late "fade-outs", such as the one against Benevento. For much of this autumn Milan were without a fitness coach after Montella's surprise September decision to sack his fitness coach and long-time aide Emanuele Marra.

Gattuso, perhaps unfairly characterised as an "instinctive" coach who emphasises above all the "emotive" aspects of playing for Milan, clearly believes the squad's overall fitness levels need radical improvement. For the Rijeka game he left his entire first team at home in Milanello to train while he travelled to Croatia with a reserve side.

There is no doubt that Gattuso now faces an imposing task, as does the club's management.

Something of the nature of Milan's problems off the pitch was recently highlighted by the *New York Times* in an analysis of the club's new ownership structure. The start of the article in the paper is indicative, reading: "When the Chinese businessman Li Yonghong bought AC Milan, the world-famous Italian soccer club, virtually nobody in Italy had heard of him. Virtually nobody in China had, either."

> "I'm so upset at UEFA. It's a joke, it's crazy. It makes no sense. They [Milan] don't have the money"
>
> **Roma president James Pallotta on FIFA's stalled financial fairplay investigation**

Last April, former World Cup-winning coach Marcello Lippi, who is China's national coach, made the same point.

According to the *New York Times*, Chinese spending on football has totalled approximately €1.5 billion over the last five years. Worried that the spending was part of an exodus of money from China so vast that it could destabilise the economy, the government has ordered its banks to scrutinize lending to some of the country's biggest deal makers.

The *NYT* continued: "In the case of Mr Li, the [phosphate] mines that he told AC Milan he controlled have been owned by four different people since last year, according to Chinese corporate records. The business changed hands twice for no money, the documents show."

Furthermore, as pointed out by Roma president Pallotta, Li Yonghong did indeed borrow money from the hedge fund firm Elliott in order to close the purchase deal on Milan.

That €308m must be repaid by October 2018, at an 11 per cent interest rate, bringing the repayment to around €380m. If the club cannot repay the loan, then Milan becomes the property of Elliott. In order to avoid this scenario, the club, through advisory company BGB Weston, has initiated talks with the private equity company Highbridge Capital Management with a view to its debt-refinancing issue.

It is believed that the deal might also include an equity investment by the fund into the parent company Rossoneri Sport Lux controlled by Li Yonghong.

It is in this overall and complex context that UEFA has been in consultation with Milan to try to understand just what credible business plan the club has in place, in order to meet the European governing body's financial fairplay regulations. Inevitably, if and when UEFA decide that it is not satisfied with Milan's plans, then the club could face a fine or sanctions, or indeed both.

Adding to this complex picture is speculation from Rome daily *La Repubblica* that the Saudi Fawaz family could be ready to invest €30m in Milan.

Furthermore, there must now be the possibility that if things get tight between now and October, then the club could be seriously tempted into selling its top players. For example, when 18-year-old goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma threatened not to sign a new contract in June, market speculation put a €30m price tag on his head. Money like that might become very welcome at Milan next summer.

In the meantime, Gattuso will have his work cut out in attempting to land the new regime's obvious primary objective for this first full season, namely a top-four finish and consequent place in the lucrative Champions League. At this point in time, a top-six finish and consequent Europa League place might be more realistic.

Speaking on RAI the morning after the 2-1 win over Bologna, Fassone summed up the current Milan situation succinctly, saying: "From what I can see from my daily contacts with Han Li [Milan director and trusted aide of Li Yonghong], this is a long-term project. I don't believe that Li Yonghong has any intention of selling the club. I don't see any clouds on the Milan horizon, they have made a huge investment, more than a billion euro.

"We have a low level of debt which we will be able to meet next October. If we just had a couple more good results, we'd be looking at the world with a very different smile."

Sounds as though the Milan family will have had plenty to talk about over their Christmas dinner. WS

Inter arrivals... Marco Fassone (left) and Massimiliano Mirabelli (right)

Off the mark...Gennaro Gattuso celebrates the 2-1 victory over Bologna

2017 AWARDS RESULTS

WorldSoccer Awards 2017

THE RESULTS OF OUR 35TH ANNUAL AWARDS – AND THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED SHAPE THE GAME OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

PLAYER | TEAM | MANAGER | PEOPLE | HEROES & VILLAINS

28

39

34

30

30

WORLD SOCCER AWARDS 2017

Ronaldo leads Real Madrid's clean sweep

Cristiano Ronaldo of Real Madrid and Portugal is *World Soccer*'s World Player of the Year for 2017. He led a clean sweep, with his club side being voted World Team of the Year and their coach Zinedine Zidane a clear choice as World Manager of the Year.

Ronaldo scored twice as Real Madrid won a record-extending 12th European Champions Cup with a 4-1 victory over Juventus in Cardiff. In doing so they became the first club to retain the trophy since the Champions League group-stage format was introduced and the first team to successfully defend the European Cup since Milan in 1990.

Ronaldo, who also scored the only goal as Real Madrid again won the Club World Cup, retained the award ahead of his great rival Lionel Messi and has now won the award for a record fifth time. His previous successes were in 2008, 2013, 2014 and 2016.

Ronaldo will turn 33 in February and it remains to be seen whether he can stay at the top of the world game. This past year has seen the emergence of Neymar as an individual star in his own right, following his world-record transfer from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain. The Brazilian finished third in the *World Soccer* poll, ahead of Croatian midfielder Luka Modric, who was right;y recognised for his role in Real Madrid's success, while Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon was in fifth place.

Tottenham Hotspur striker Harry Kane was the highest-ranked Premier League player in sixth, with Manchester City's

Kevin De Bruyne in eighth position.

Bayern Munich and Poland's Robert Lewandowski (7th), the top scorer in the European World Cup qualifiers, was the leading Bundesliga player.

Toni Kroos (9th) and Sergio Ramos (10th) completed the top 10, which featured four players from European champions Real Madrid.

Zidane was the clear winner of the Manager of the Year award, ahead of Manchester City's Pep Guardiola, Brazil's Tite and Leonardo Jardim of Monaco.

Madrid were the overwhelming winners of the Team award, taking a record percentage of the vote.

The awards were decided by votes from an international panel of 75 journalists and pundits who chose their top 10 players of the year, with points awarded to each selection.

Out in front... Cristiano Ronaldo

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Rnk	Name	Pts
1	**Cristiano Ronaldo** *Real Madrid & Portugal*	715 votes
2	**Lionel Messi** *Barcelona & Argentina*	663
3	**Neymar** *Barcelona/Paris Saint-Germain & Brazil*	437
4	**Luka Modric** *Real Madrid & Croatia*	237
5	**Gianluigi Buffon** *Juventus & Italy*	205
6	**Harry Kane** *Tottenham Hotspur & England*	181
7	**Robert Lewandowski** *Bayern Munich & Poland*	162
8	**Kevin De Bruyne** *Manchester City & Belgium*	152
9	**Toni Kroos** *Real Madrid & Germany*	146
10	**Sergio Ramos** *Real Madrid & Spain*	143
11	**Eden Hazard** *Chelsea & Belgium*	109
12	**N'Golo Kante** *Chelsea & France*	83
13	**Paulo Dybala** *Juventus & Argentina*	76
14	**Luis Suarez** *Barcelona & Uruguay*	74
15	**Marcelo** *Real Madrid & Brazil*	72
16	**Kylian Mbappe** *Monaco/Paris Saint-Germain & France*	66
17	**Isco** *Real Madrid & Spain*	52
18	**Andres Iniesta** *Barcelona & Spain*	42
19=	**David De Gea** *Manchester United & Spain*	40

Runner-up... Lionel Messi

Rnk	Name	Pts
19=	**Antoine Griezmann** *Atletico Madrid & France*	40
21	**Edinson Cavani** *Paris-Saint-Germain & Uruguay*	39
22	**Sergio Aguero** *Manchester City & Argentina*	34
23	**Manuel Neuer** *Bayern Munich & Germany*	28
24	**Mohamed Salah** *Roma/Liverpool & Egypt*	25
25	**Dani Carvajal** *Real Madrid & Spain*	21
26=	**Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang** *Borussia Dortmund & Gabon*	19
26=	**Leonardo Bonucci** *Juventus/Milan & Italy*	19
28	**Paul Pogba** *Manchester United & France*	18
29	**Jan Oblak** *Atletico Madrid & Slovenia*	17
30=	**Philippe Coutinho** *Liverpool & Brazil*	13
30=	**Christian Eriksen** *Tottenham Hotspur & Denmark*	13
32=	**Gareth Bale** *Real Madrid & Wales*	12
32=	**Gonzalo Higuain** *Juventus & Argentina*	12
34=	**Dani Alves** *Juventus/Paris Saint-Germain & Brazil*	9
34=	**Keylor Navas** *Real Madrid & Costa Rica*	9
36=	**Sadio Mane** *Liverpool & Senegal*	8
36=	**Dries Mertens** *Napoli & Belgium*	8
36=	**Radja Nainggolan** *Roma & Belgium*	8
39=	**Fabinho** *Monaco & Brazil*	7
39=	**Mats Hummels** *Bayern Munich & Germany*	7
39=	**Gerard Pique** *Barcelona & Spain*	7
39=	**Miralem Pjanic** *Juventus & Bosnia-Herzegovina*	7
43=	**Karim Benzema** *Real Madrid & France*	6
43=	**Casemiro** *Real Madrid & Brazil*	6
43=	**Paolo Guerrero** *Flamengo & Peru*	6
46=	**Giorgio Chiellini** *Juventus & Italy*	5
46=	**Radamel Falcao** *Monaco & Colombia*	5
46=	**Aron Gunnarsson** *Cardiff City & Iceland*	5
46=	**Romelu Lukaku** *Everton/Manchester United & Belgium*	5
46	**Nemanja Matic** *Chelsea/Manchester United & Serbia*	5
46	**Saul Niguez** *Atletico Madrid & Spain*	5
52=	**Marco Asensio** *Real Madrid & Spain*	4
52=	**Marquinhos** *Paris Saint-Germain & Brazil*	4
52=	**Thomas Muller** *Bayern Munich & Germany*	4
55=	**Omar Abdulrahman** *Al Ain & UAE*	3
55=	**Alvaro Morata** *Real Madrid/Chelsea & Spain*	3
57=	**Michael Bradley** *Toronto & USA*	2
57=	**Ederson** *Benfica/Manchester City & Brazil*	2
57=	**Gabriel Jesus** *Manchester City & Brazil*	2
57=	**Marcus Rashford** *Manchester United & England*	2
57=	**Arjen Robben** *Bayern Munich & Holland*	2
57=	**Marco Verratti** *Paris Saint-Germain & Italy*	2
63=	**Christian Bassogog** *Henan Jianaye & Cameroon*	1
63=	**Benjamin Mendy** *Monaco/Manchester City & France*	1
63=	**Mesut Ozil** *Arsenal & Germany*	1
63=	**Alexis Sanchez** *Arsenal & Chile*	1
63=	**Leroy Sane** *Manchester City & Germany*	1
63=	**David Silva** *Manchester City & Spain*	1
63=	**Raheem Sterling** *Manchester City & England*	1
63=	**Timo Werner** *RB Leipzig & Germany*	1

Decisive ...Real Madrid

WORLD MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Rnk	Name	Pts
1	**Zinedine Zidane** *Real Madrid*	42 Votes
2	**Pep Guardiola** *Manchester City*	8
3	**Tite** *Brazil*	5
4	**Leonardo Jardim** *Monaco*	4
5=	**Heimir Hallgrimsson** *Iceland*	3
5=	**Mauricio Pochettino** *Tottenham Hotspur*	3
7=	**Antonio Conte** *Chelsea*	2
7=	**Joachim Low** *Germany*	2
9=	**Max Allegri** *Juventus*	1
9=	**Ricardo Gareca** *Peru*	1
9=	**Graham Potter** *Ostersund*	1
9=	**Carlos Queiroz** *Iran*	1
9=	**Renato Gaucho** *Gremio*	1
9=	**St Georges coaching team** *England u17/u20*	1

Top boss... Zinedine Zidane

WORLD TEAM OF THE YEAR

Rnk	Name	Pts
1	**Real Madrid**	57 votes
2=	**Brazil**	2
2=	**Germany**	2
2=	**Iceland**	2
2=	**Iran**	2
2=	**Monaco**	2
7=	**Barcelona**	1
7=	**Celtic**	1
7=	**Chapecoense**	1
7=	**England under-17s**	1
7=	**Holland women's**	1
7=	**Juventus**	1
7=	**Manchester City**	1
7=	**Ostersund**	1
7=	**Syria**	1

• *For full details of how the panel voted, go to worldsoccer.com/awards*

The best of the best

World Player Cristiano Ronaldo | **World Team** Real Madrid | **World Manager** Zinedine Zidane

Cristiano Ronaldo's recent assertion that he is the world's best-ever player met with emphatic resistance from Diego Maradona. "Tell him to stop f*****g around," said the Argentinian, who reminded his interviewer of others with claims to the title. "I didn't see much, but I loved what I saw from Di Stefano, Cruyff, Messi maybe..."

There will always be those who claim Cristiano is not even the best Ronaldo to have played for Real Madrid. But the clutch of individual awards that have been bestowed upon him ensure his place in the record books.

This is Ronaldo's fifth World Player of the Year award, one more than his great rival Lionel Messi and more than any other player in the history of the 35-year-old award.

In 2017, Ronaldo played a key role in Madrid's Champions League success and is now the club's all-time record scorer. But at 33, this summer's World Cup will be his last chance to land the one prize that has eluded him during his career.

And his influence at Madrid could also be starting to wane, with the club's pursuit of Kylian Mbappe last summer and the persistent rumours linking them with a move for Neymar suggesting that Real are now looking to pay top-dollar for the next generation of superstars.

In many ways Ronaldo and Real Madrid have been a perfect partnership. During Florentino Perez's presidency, a commitment to *Galactico* players has allowed a player who delights in individual glory to flourish.

The Team of the Year award is recognition of Madrid's sweep of international trophies in 2017: the Champions League (a record 11th European Cup), the European Super Cup and the Club World Cup.

Club finances are healthier than ever, with record revenues of €674m for 2016-17, with little debt.

All of this has been achieved with a coach, Zinedine Zidane, who was never expected to pursue a career in top-level coaching. And even now the Frenchman finds his position questioned, with Madrid lagging behind Barcelona in La Liga's title race this season.

However, whether through luck or judgment, Zidane is now the club's most successful coach of all time. His Real Madrid side have won eight of the 11 competitions they have entered, with the 2017 Club World Cup success meaning the Frenchman has won more international trophies than Miguel Munoz and Vicente Del Bosque.

A golden era, indeed.

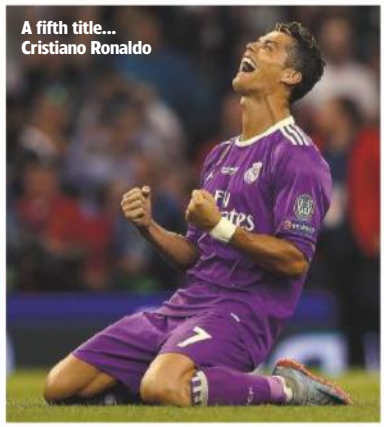
Gavin Hamilton

Iconic...Diego Maradona

Real champion... Zinedine Zidane

Previous World Player winners

1982	**PAOLO ROSSI**	*Juventus & Italy*
1983	**ZICO**	*Udinese & Brazil*
1984	**MICHEL PLATINI**	*Juventus & France*
1985	**MICHEL PLATINI**	*Juventus & France*
1986	**DIEGO MARADONA**	*Napoli & Argentina*
1987	**RUUD GULLIT**	*Milan & Holland*
1988	**MARCO VAN BASTEN**	*Milan & Holland*
1989	**RUUD GULLIT**	*Milan & Holland*
1990	**LOTHAR MATTHAUS**	*Internazionale & West Germany*
1991	**JEAN-PIERRE PAPIN**	*Marseille & France*
1992	**MARCO VAN BASTEN**	*Milan & Holland*
1993	**ROBERTO BAGGIO**	*Juventus & Italy*
1994	**PAOLO MALDINI**	*Milan & Italy*
1995	**GIANLUCA VIALLI**	*Juventus & Italy*
1996	**RONALDO**	*Barcelona & Brazil*
1997	**RONALDO**	*Barcelona/Internazionale & Brazil*
1998	**ZINEDINE ZIDANE**	*Juventus & France*
1999	**RIVALDO**	*Barcelona & Brazil*
2000	**LUIS FIGO**	*Barcelona/Real Madrid & Portugal*
2001	**MICHAEL OWEN**	*Liverpool & England*
2002	**RONALDO**	*Internazionale/Real Madrid & Brazil*
2003	**PAVEL NEDVED**	*Juventus & Czech Republic*
2004	**RONALDINHO**	*Barcelona & Brazil*
2005	**RONALDINHO**	*Barcelona & Brazil*
2006	**FABIO CANNAVARO**	*Juventus/Real Madrid & Italy*
2007	**KAKA**	*Milan & Brazil*
2008	**CRISTIANO RONALDO**	*Manchester United & Portugal*
2009	**LIONEL MESSI**	*Barcelona & Argentina*
2010	**XAVI**	*Barcelona & Spain*
2011	**LIONEL MESSI**	*Barcelona & Argentina*
2012	**LIONEL MESSI**	*Barcelona & Argentina*
2013	**CRISTIANO RONALDO**	*Real Madrid & Portugal*
2014	**CRISTIANO RONALDO**	*Real Madrid & Portugal*
2015	**LIONEL MESSI**	*Barcelona & Argentina*
2016	**CRISTIANO RONALDO**	*Real Madrid & Portugal*



A fifth title... Cristiano Ronaldo

The Judging Panel

Paddy Agnew	Italy
Juan Carlos Aguero	Costa Rica
Domenic Aquilina	Malta
Momodou Bah	Gambia
Guillem Balague	Spain
Sam Beckwith	Czech Republic
Giuseppe Bergomi	Italy
Nick Bidwell	Germany
Alexander Bobrov	Russia
Carlos Carpio	Spain
Nathan Carr	England
Gabriel Cazenave	Paraguay
Francois Colin	Belgium
Mike Collett	England
Dez Corkhill	Malaysia
Sean Creedon	Rep Ireland
Peterjon Cresswell	Hungary
Steve Darby	Vietnam
Vicente Dattoli	Brazil
Klaas-Jan Droppert	Holland
Jan Hermann De Bruijn	Holland
Martin Del Palacio Langer	Mexico
Jerzy Dudek	Poland
John Duerden	South Korea
Danilo Diaz	Chile
Les Dickens	Ecuador
Christian Eichler	Germany
Claudio Ekai	Kenya
Adel Ferdowsipour	Iran
Paul Gardner	United States
Brian Glanville	England
Mark Gleeson	South Africa
Miron Goihman	Moldova
Phil Gordon	Scotland
Victor Gusev	Russia
Simon Hill	Australia
Jim Holden	England
Skapti Hallgrimsson	Iceland
Eoin Hand	Rep Ireland
Sasa Ibrulj	Bosnia
Howard Johnson	France
Brian Kerr	Rep Ireland
Roy Kitson	Northern Ireland
Tom Kundert	Portugal
Dariusz Kurowski	Poland
Lasana Liburd	Trinidad & Tobago
Abdulrahman Magdy	Egypt
Alberto Mandolesi	Italy
Mehmet Cagri Davan	Turkey
Steve Menary	England
Glenn Moore	England
Andres Must	Estonia
Vladimir Novak	Serbia
Gezim Nushi	Albania
Oluwashina Okaleji	Nigeria
Yazid Ouahib	Algeria
Rumen Paytashev	Bulgaria
Diego Paz	Guatemala
Michel Petrak	Czech Republic
Maurizio Pizzoferrato	Italy
Mike Plastow	Japan
Keir Radnedge	England
Emanuel Rosu	Romania
Kareem Ruiz	Mexico
Seo Hyung-wook	South Korea
Manos Starampoulos	Greece
Milorad Stojmanovski	Macedonia
Jacques Sys	Belgium
Rok Tamse	Slovenia
Troels Bager Thogersen	Denmark
Vijhay Vick	Malaysia
Mike Woitalla	United States
Oleg Zadernovsky	Ukraine
Wladyslaw Zmuda	Poland

PRO:DIRECT

PURO FENOMENO

MEET THE NEW PHENOMENON

Recognised as one of the game's greatest ever players, R9 Ronaldo was known as the original "Fenomeno" in his home country of Brazil. He possessed electric speed, lethal finishing in front of goal, and the ability to strike fear into any defence, even before a ball's been kicked.

A player like that needed a boot to match his explosive style of play. In 1998 for the World Cup in France, Nike engineered their first ever speed boot, the Mercurial. Constructed from lightweight synthetic, the Mercurial was a gamechanger in terms of design, performance and creating history for the brand.

Now, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Mercurial silo, Nike remixes elements of R9's '98 Mercurial for Neymar Jr's second signature edition Mercurial Vapor. The new boot features the same bright colour palette and wave graphic design of the original, while additional details pay tribute to Neymar's success and journey to becoming regarded as the new phenomenon.

NIKE MERCURIAL VAPOR XI NEYMAR FG
QR: 173965 - **£210**

PLAYER

KYLIAN MBAPPE

From teenage protege to global phenomenon in 12 months

Supporters of Caen do not like to be reminded of the time, five years ago, when they allowed future global hot-shot Kylian Mbappe – then just a 14-year-old kid – to slip through their fingers.

Back in the spring of 2012, Caen must have thought they had the winning lottery ticket in their back pocket.

After several years of building up a relationship with the much-coveted front-line prodigy and his family, a deal was in place for him to come on board the following year, on a three-season apprenticeship which would segue into a three-campaign first professional contract. But all too quickly that arrangement began to unravel, with Caen slipping out of the top flight and coach/general manager Franck Dumas, an instrumental figure in the charm offensive, leaving the club.

With Caen forced to tighten their belts following demotion, their then-head of youth recruitment, Laurent Glaize, reluctantly had to admit that the bonuses they had promised in the deal (€180,000 in the event of promotion back to Ligue 1; €120,000 should they remain in the second tier) were too rich for their blood. Once-in-a-generation prospect or not, the offer would have to be withdrawn.

"Saying no to Mbappe was the most difficult moment of my career," revealed Glaize in a documentary recently aired on L'Equipe TV. "Previously, everything had been settled.

"We'd prepared a letter for Clairefontaine [the French national academy where Mbappe was a day boy] informing them that Kylian was going to sign for us. The Mbappe family were in total agreement with everything we put to them. Other clubs offered them more, but they still went with us."

Young star... Kylian Mbappe

Caen's disengagement left Real Madrid and Monaco as the youngster's two most serious suitors. Feeling that a move abroad was premature, he eventually decided to select Monaco as his career base camp, arriving at the La Turbie academy in the summer of 2013.

Would his sporting life have turned out any differently if he had signed for Caen? Of course, we will never know. However, what no one can deny is that Monaco was the making of him, the place where he honed his natural talent, learned the nuts and bolts of the professional game and soaked up the atmosphere of a leading French team, one with multiple domestic titles and a long-track record in European competition.

While Monaco provided the launch-pad, they still needed the projectile – and last season Mbappe was their rocket man, the jet-heeled and multi-faceted attacker with the sort of skills, game intelligence and finishing ability which normally only the gods can bequeath.

Not for him the step-by-step route to the stars. Here was a meteoric nine-month intergalactic trip featuring a Ligue 1 winners medal, a Champions League semi-final, his first full cap for France in March 2017 against Luxembourg, a €180million transfer last summer to Paris Saint-Germain – which officially accounted for Financial Fairplay purposes as a loan with a binding option to buy next year – a fine seventh-place in the Ballon d'Or ballot and the Golden Boy award as the leading under-21 player in Europe.

The very essence of rapid advancement. Boy to man light years ahead of schedule. "He's very young, but gives the impression of being about 30," laughs Juventus and France midfielder Blaise Matuidi.

Opponents be warned. The teenager from the Parisian suburb of Bondy is just warming up. His best is yet to come.

Nick Bidwell

The Facts

AGE 19 (20.12.98)

PLAYING HIGHLIGHTS
He scored 27 goals in 60 games for Monaco, winning the Ligue 1 title, reaching the Champions League semi-finals and earned a move to PSG. He has won 10 caps so far for France, scoring once – against Holland in August 2017.

DID YOU KNOW?
At the age of 11, he had a trial with Chelsea and played for the club in a junior game against Charlton Athletic.

"Mbappe is much better than Gareth Bale"

Former PSG and France defender Alain Roche sets the scene for the Champions League showdown with Real Madrid

COACH

SARINA WIEGMAN

Victorious Dutch women's coach at Euro 2017

There must have been times over the past year when officials at The Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB) looked at the success of their women's team, and then the failures of the men's, and wondered what would happen if they asked the architect behind the former to revive the latter.

It will not happen, though, because the coach of the Women's European Championship winners is a woman.

Sarina Wiegman has coached men, having spent a year on the staff at Eredivisie club Sparta Rotterdam, but even in a liberal country like Holland, the idea of appointing a female as men's national coach is inconceivable.

Which is a shame, because the team that won Euro 2017 did so playing a classic Dutch 4-3-3 of the type the men still aspire to but can no longer deliver.

The *Oranjevrouwen* were the summer tournament's outstanding team, winning all six of their games and scoring 13 goals to three. Their play was attractive and enterprising – and yet, going into the tournament they were mere dark horses.

Wiegman took over in January after the KNVB decided Arjan Van der Laan was not taking the team in the right direction. With valuable assistance from Foppe De Haan, she revitalised the team, imbuing the side with a relaxed confidence that enabled them to draw inspiration from host nation expectancy and play with a vibrant freedom.

With the men's team in the doldrums the country got behind their women, filling stadia and turning out in their thousands to celebrate their triumph.

The public response was as gratifying to Wiegman as the success, with Euro 2017 regarded by the Dutch as a chance to turbo-charge women's football in the country. "One of our goals," says Wiegman, was "to conquer the hearts of the Dutch people. It became much bigger than we had hoped for and dreamed about."

Triumph..the Euro 2017-winning coach

The next stage is to create an environment in which players can make a living from the game, something Wiegman was never able to do.

Now 48, she won 104 caps in a 14-year international career, initially as a midfielder, then in central defence. As a teenager she was invited to study and play in North Carolina alongside future US Olympic and World Cup two-time winner Mia Hamm. However, she subsequently returned home and spent the rest of her playing career with Ter Leede, winning two league titles.

With Dutch women's football then entirely amateur, Wiegman combined playing with being a PE teacher, retiring at 34 when her second child was due. Moving into coaching she won domestic doubles with both her former club and her hometown team, Den Haag. She began working with the national team in 2014, acting as assistant to two male coaches before being given the chance to lead the team herself.

Two formative episodes were the years she spent in the USA and at Sparta.

Tar Heels, the University of North Carolina team, were run as a professional outfit and long dominated the college scene, while working in the pro men's environment at Sparta further underlined the standards required to succeed.

It is an oddity that, although still in the minority, female coaches have won 11 of the last 12 major prizes in the women's game (World Cups, Olympics, Euros). This could be because they need to be better than their male peers to be given the chance. Or it could be that the countries which are prepared to appoint women – Germany, USA, the Nordic nations, Holland – are also those more likely to be successful as they have a strong heritage and a large playing base.

Wiegman, one of six female head coaches in the 16-nation Euros, says women need to be "bolder". She has been pushing for greater education for female coaches but adds: "We women – I generalise here – should take chances and not be humble."

In taking hers Wiegman should have inspired others to take theirs.

Glenn Moore

The Facts

AGE 48 (26.10.69)

PLAYING HIGHLIGHTS
Won the Dutch Cup twice (with KFC '71 and Ter Leede), the Dutch league twice (both times with Ter Leede) and the NCAA Division I Women's Soccer Championship in the USA (with North Carolina Tar Heels). Capped 104 times by Holland.

COACHING HIGHLIGHTS
Won Euro 2017 with Holland and twice did the Dutch league and cup double, with Ter Leede and ADO Den Haag Women. Was named the Best FIFA Women's Coach in 2017.

DID YOU KNOW?
In 2001 she became the first footballer to make a century of appearances for Holland.

"I have a lot of respect for Sarina. For the men, everything is arranged. Here, this is much more difficult"

Former men's national coach, Louis van Gaal

PLAYER

ABDELHAK **NOURI**

Young Ajax forward struck by tragedy

On a pleasant, sunny Saturday afternoon in July, Ajax and Werder Bremen met in a pre-season friendly in the village of Hippach in the Tyrol region of western Austria. Some 20 minutes from time, with the ball on the other side of the pitch, Ajax attacking midfielder Abdelhak Nouri suddenly fell to the floor. Medics rushed to his aid, administering CPR, before the 20-year-old was airlifted to hospital in nearby Innsbruck.

At first, the medical bulletin was reassuring, with Ajax announcing that he had been successfully resuscitated after suffering cardiac arrhythmias (heart-rhythm problems) and was "out of danger". But four days later, the tragic truth would emerge: a life-changing diagnosis of extensive, permanent brain damage, due to a shortage of oxygen during the initial incident.

"He cannot walk, cannot talk, does not recognise us, does not know who we are," said his brother Mohammed. "He does not feel anything, he does not hear anything. The base of his brain is mostly damaged and is not functioning. According to the doctor, he will never heal."

As soon as the dreadful news breaks, Ajax supporters, the Dutch football family and other well-wishers rallied around the ill-fated youngster more commonly known as "Appie". Outside the Nouri family home in the Geuzenveld district of Amsterdam, thousands of sympathisers came together to stage an emotional vigil. The entire Ajax squad, many of them in tears, also called in.

Collapsed...medics attend to Nouri on the pitch

Tragedy...Abdelhak Nouri in action against Werder Bremen

Although not yet a first-team regular at Ajax, Nouri was very much tipped for the top, categorised from the earliest of ages as an Ajax academy boy wonder, marking his debut last season with a brilliant free-kick goal in a domestic cup win over Willem II.

Diminutive, but hugely inventive, the Amsterdammer with Moroccan roots was a natural. He would thrill, he would entertain and he wound enchant. And, invariably, always with a smile on his face.

Hamburg's Rick Van Drongelen told German paper *Die Welt*: "I played with him for Young Netherlands representative teams and he probably was the biggest talent in Dutch football.

"He always performed with vision and awareness. He did things with a ball that I've never seen before. He'd say to me: 'Rick, play me in. Don't worry if there's a man on me or not.' He was right. I could always trust him. It was a real shock to hear about his accident. It's a tragedy his career is over. He never went to parties and did everything he could to make it as a footballer.

"He lived for the game. You realise that everything can be over so quickly.

"Even now I often look at videos of him in action. That he couldn't go on to live his dream makes me sad."

Nick Bidwell

The Facts

AGE 20 (02.04.97)

PLAYING HIGHLIGHTS
A product of the Amsterdam club's academy, he made his debut for Jong Ajax in 2015 in an Eerste Divisie game against VVV Venlo and scored 11 goals in 45 league games. He stepped up to the first team in 2016 and went on to make nine Eredivisie appearances. His exploits with Jong Ajax saw him named Player of the Season in the 2016–17 Eerste Divisie. He was capped by Holland at all levels from under-15 to under-19.

DID YOU KNOW?
Despite his condition, Nouri was given the no34 shirt and listed as a member of the Ajax first-team squad ahead of the current Eredivisie season.

"Abdelhak has such great talent, but unfortunately we will never know how far his star would have reached if this had not happened to him"

Former goalkeeper and Ajax chief executive, Edwin van der Sar

COACH

HEIMIR **HALLGRIMSSON**

Part-time dentist who transformed Iceland

Soon to lead Iceland as they make their first-ever World Cup appearance, the 50-year-old Heimir Hallgrimsson does not only pick the team and choose the tactics; he is also the heart and soul of his nation's football culture. He is the guardian of what the game stands for on a collection of volcanic rock in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean.

Whereas his entire squad is made up of overseas-based players, he has never worked outside of his homeland and draws extensively on that unbroken connection in his job, forever promoting what he sees as Iceland's unique sporting virtues: their discipline, unity, industry, power in one-on-one duels, humility and undaunted spirit. These are the seams Hallgrimsson looks to mine for his marginal gains. Characteristics, which in business parlance, are his profit margin.

Nor does he only bring influence to bear on the training ground and in the technical area.

A dentist by trade, he is also a specialist in extracting good will, fostering strong links with clubs and coaches at all domestic levels, and going out of his way to identify with supporters.

In his six years on the national-team back-room staff – first as an assistant to Lars Lagerback, then in a joint-managerial combo with the latter, and in sole charge for the last 18 months – he has made it a priority to be as accessible as possible. Two hours before every home game in Reykjavik, he turns up at a nearby sports bar for a chat with fans. And not just to exchange pleasantries, either. He tells them the starting line-up, talks strategy, replies to questions and has even been known to give an airing to the players' pep-talk DVDs.

Heart and soul... Heimir Hallgrimsson

No wonder Iceland and their fans form such a formidable close-knit unit - as seen in the fact that they have not lost a competitive international on their home Laugardalsvollur patch in four-and-a-half years, their last reverse being a 4-2 loss to Slovenia in 2014 World Cup qualifier.

Hallgrimsson undoubtedly has been dealt a fine hand. At his disposal is the best crop of footballers in the country's history – the result of a massive investment in grass-roots facilities and coaching over the past decade-and-a-half. And because so many of his squad have grown up together, the team's understanding is second to none.

Talent...he has a fine crop of players to work with

However, someone still has to pull it all together and he has proved quite a dream weaver. Quick to learn and adapt, he is a meticulous organiser, ferociously ambitious, open and easy going, yet authoritative and demanding.

After their stupendous showing at Euro 2016, the Icelanders could easily have suffered something of a hangover, been overwhelmed by a tidal wave of positive publicity. But with Hallgrimsson at the helm, they have not missed a beat, remaining as hungry as ever and topping one of the toughest of World Cup qualifying groups, one which also featured Croatia, Ukraine and Turkey.

Many would have expected the Icelanders to have been worked out by now. It's to Hallgrimsson's immense credit that they continue to be a step ahead. Small fry? Anything but.

Nick Bidwell

The Facts

AGE 50 (10.06.67)

COACHING HIGHLIGHTS
Took up his first coaching position while still a player, looking after Hottur's women's team. He later led IBV's women's team to victory in the 2004 Icelandic Cup. Co-coach of Iceland's men's team at Euro 2016, where they beat England on their way to the quarter-finals, and will be in sole charge of the national side this summer when they play at their first ever World Cup.

DID YOU KNOW?
While watching a women's game in 2016, Hallgrimsson witnessed Fylkir's Rut Kristjansdottir damage a tooth during a game. After helping her off the pitch, he drove her to his office where he then fixed her tooth.

"When you think about the World Cup, you think about Argentina and Brazil, so it's a little bit of a romantic feeling to play Argentina in the first game"

Hallgrimsson on Iceland's opening World Cup game, in Moscow on June 16

PLAYER

ENIOLA **ALUKO**

Striker who exposed institutional incompetence at the FA

It was all going so well. England's women had finished third at the 2015 World Cup in Canada and in July 2017 they reached the semi-finals of the Euros. But then the bubble was punctured in the most unlikely fashion, with a parliamentary inquiry at the House of Commons.

The outcome of a hearing into the treatment of England striker Eniola Aluko left the FA matching the popular perception of being dysfunctional and out-of-touch as well as years short of progress towards diversity comprehension and administrative reform.

Exposing the need for progress within the governing body may ultimately prove an even more significant achievement by Aluko than her 33 goals in 102 games for an England team from which she was dropped controversially in 2016.

England's manager Mark Sampson, who was sacked ahead of the hearing, may not be the last casualty of the Aluko row. For the time being at least, FA chairman Greg Clarke, chief executive Martin Glenn and technical director Dan Ashworth all remain in place. This is, after all, a men's World Cup year.

Trouble erupted in the spring of 2016 when Aluko, a Nigerian-born lawyer, complained of racism and bullying by Sampson and other staff over the previous two years.

Aluko's accusations included an incident in which Sampson had told her to "make sure [your family] don't come over with Ebola" before an England game against Germany at Wembley.

An internal "culture review" for the FA was undertaken by Ashworth, during which time Aluko was dropped by Sampson. In September 2016, Ashworth and HR director Rachel Brace told Aluko that no wrongdoing by Sampson had been found. Aluko rejected their findings and the FA instructed barrister Katharine Newton to undertake an investigation into her complaints. Newton's first inquiry was inconclusive, but a second inquiry found Sampson did make the Ebola comment and had also upset mixed-race Drew Spence by asking how many times she had been arrested.

Happier times... Eniola Aluko in action for England

In September, the parliamentary digital, culture, media and sport committee announced a hearing into the Sampson affair in its ongoing review of sports governance.

Two weeks later, and a month before the hearing, Sampson was sacked. The FA said its decision was unconnected with Aluko but based on allegations concerning Sampson's time at Bristol Academy, from 2009 to 2013 – which begged the question about why the FA had appointed Sampson in the first place, in December 2013.

In front of the Commons committee, the FA quartet of Clarke, Glenn, Ashworth and Brace were on the back foot from the start. Hours before the hearing the FA had issued a lengthy statement of apology to Aluko and Spence after accepting the conclusions of the third inquiry that Sampson, after all, had made discriminatory remarks.

The FA were also derided over the refusal to pay the second half of an £80,000 settlement. Aluko said she had rejected a suggestion from Glenn that she issue a statement saying the FA was not institutionally racist to clear the way for the remaining payment, describing that as "bordering on blackmail".

Payment was made shortly after the hearing during which Clarke stated that the inadequate employee safeguard procedures had been vastly improved.

His own strategy was to distance himself from Glenn and the FA's operational matters. Clarke told MPs: "I've tried to stay within my governance box. I'm a non-executive chairman. My job is to chair the board not run the FA." But he added: "We have not lost faith with the management team."

That, however, may not be the end of the matter.

Keir Radnedge

The Facts

AGE 30 (21.02.87)

PLAYING HIGHLIGHTS
During her time in the English WSL with Birmingham City, Charlton Athletic and Chelsea she has won the league twice, the FA Women's Cup three times and the Women's Premier League Cup once. She has also played in the USA for Saint Louis Athletica, Atlanta Beat and Sky Blue. At international level, she has scored 33 goals in 102 games for England and been a bronze medallist at the 2015 World Cup, a runner-up at the Euros and a three-time winner at the invitational Cyprus Cup. At the 2012 Olympics she represented Great Britain and reached the quarter-finals.

DID YOU KNOW?
In September 2014, Aluko appeared on the BBC football programme *Match of the Day* – the first woman ever to appear on the show as a pundit.

"I've never heard such shambolic evidence about governance"

Jo Stevens MP is highly critical of the FA

PLAYER

GIANLUIGI **BUFFON**

A year of glorious failure

Having lost 4-1 to Real Madrid in June's Final, the Champions League remains the one trophy to have eluded Juventus goalkeeper and captain Gianluigi Buffon in a career that has spanned 22 years since his Serie A debut for Parma in November 1995.

Despite that disappointment, the 39-year-old vowed to play on this season, with the goal of one last World Cup with Italy this summer. However, failure to beat Sweden in a qualifying play-off marked an individual blow for Buffon as well as a collective defeat for Italian football.

The future of coach Gian Piero Ventura dominated the immediate aftermath of the *Azzurri* defeat as the former Torino boss, with his eye on a lucrative payout, refused to bow to demands for his resignation before finally giving into pressure a few days later. In contrast, Buffon quickly called time on an international career that finished with a record 175 caps.

Buffon had won the first of those on a cold October night in 1997 in a World Cup play-off against Russia. Moscow is always a daunting away venue, but that first leg was played in a mini-blizzard on a potato patch of a pitch. Worse still, Italy looked to have problems when first-choice keeper Gianluca Pagliuca had to come off after just 32 minutes. Coach Cesare Maldini had no option but to turn to his 19-year-old reserve.

Notwithstanding the blizzard, the impossible pitch and the prize at stake, Buffon's cool self-confidence and his abundant natural talent came to the fore as Italy held on to draw 1-1 before going on to clinch their place in France 98 with a 1-0 win in the return.

Twenty years on, Buffon can look back on a career with plenty of highlights, not least Italy's World Cup victory against France on penalties in Germany in 2006. And for all the disappointments of the past year there has also been plenty of individual recognition.

In November he was voted Serie A Player of the Year – the first time a keeper has won the award organised by the Italian federation. Then in December he was celebrated as *La Gazzetta dello Sport*'s Man of the Year.

"This is my last season and I'm pretty sure of the choices I make," says Buffon. "One or two more years wouldn't add or take away from what I've already achieved. The only way would be to win the Champions League. At that point, to try to win the Club World Cup..."

John Holmesdale

Over...with Leonardo Bonucci after losing to Sweden

The Facts

AGE 39
(28.03.78)

PLAYING HIGHLIGHTS
Was a winner even before his glittering career at Juventus, lifting the Italian Cup and UEFA Cup in 1999 while still with Parma. After moving to Juve in 2001 he was a Serie A winner in 2002, 2003, 2005 (rescinded), 2006 (rescinded), 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017. He also won the Italian Cup three more times, Serie B once and was a three-time runner-up in the Champions League – in 2003, 2015 and 2017. Won the 2006 World Cup with Italy.

DID YOU KNOW?
Buffon is one of only 18 players to have made at least 1,000 professional career appearances.

"Both for Juventus and for the national team I have always considered myself a soldier. Even when I'm 60 I could never turn down any call"

Buffon isn't ruling out a return to national service if required

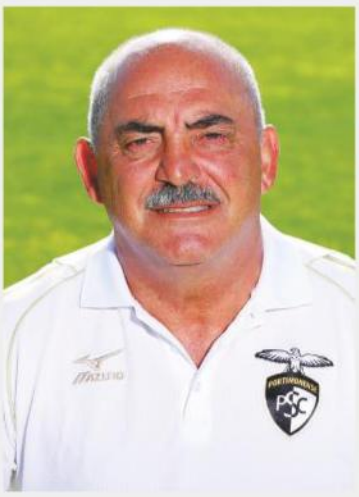
Heroes & Villains

Stars of the past 12 months

...and the bad guys of the year

TULIO DE MELO

The 32-year-old former Lille and Vallodolid forward returned for a second spell at Chapecoense – and scored the injury-time goal that guaranteed their survival in the Brazilian top flight.



VITOR OLIVEIRA

The 64-year-old continues to work wonders in Portuguese football, where he has overseen 10 promotions to the top-flight with 10 different clubs.

ROMAN TORRES

The burly US-based centre-back scored a dramatic late goal to beat Costa Rica and send Panama to their first World Cup.

TITE

After a disastrous start to their World Cup qualifying campaign, he stepped in to reinvigorate Brazil and steer them to the summer's finals.

MOHAMED SALAH

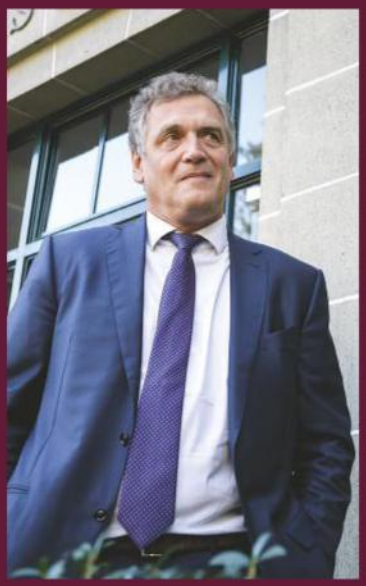
The Liverpool forward was the star of Egypt's World Cup qualifying campaign, scoring the penalty that secured the country's first World Cup participation for 28 years.

PAOLO GUERRERO

Peru's talismanic striker and all-time leading goalscorer failed a dope test and will miss his country's first World Cup for 36 years.

VITALY MUTKO

Russia's former sports minister was banned for life by the International Olympic Committee for his role in organising the doping of Russian athletes at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.



JEROME VALCKE

The former FIFA general-secretary denied receiving "undue advantages" from Paris Saint-Germain's Qatari president and BeIN boss Nasser Al Khelaifi in a bid to secure media rights for the 2026 and 2030 World Cups. Italian authorities seized a villa in Sardinia which Swiss prosecutors believed was made available to Valcke by Al Khelaifi.

FAREWELL TO...

Raymond Kopa
French wizard, three-time European Cup winner with Real Madrid, aged 85.

Graham Taylor
Former Watford, Aston Villa and England manager, aged 72.

Roberto Cabanas
Paraguayan forward at 1986 World Cup, aged 55.

Piet Keizer
Three-time European Cup winner with Ajax, aged 73.

Francois Van der Elst
Former Anderlecht, West Ham and Belgium forward, aged 62.

Steve Sumner
New Zealand captain at 1982 World Cup, aged 61.

Tommy Gemmell
Scorer of Celtic's equaliser in the 1967 European Cup Final, aged 73.

Alex Young
League winner with Everton, aged 80.

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

The Billionaires Club
by James Montague
A highly entertaining and revealing investigation into the new generation of mega-wealthy football club owners.

Sir Matt Busby: The Definitive Biography
by Patrick Barclay
Exhaustive study of Manchester United's greatest manager.

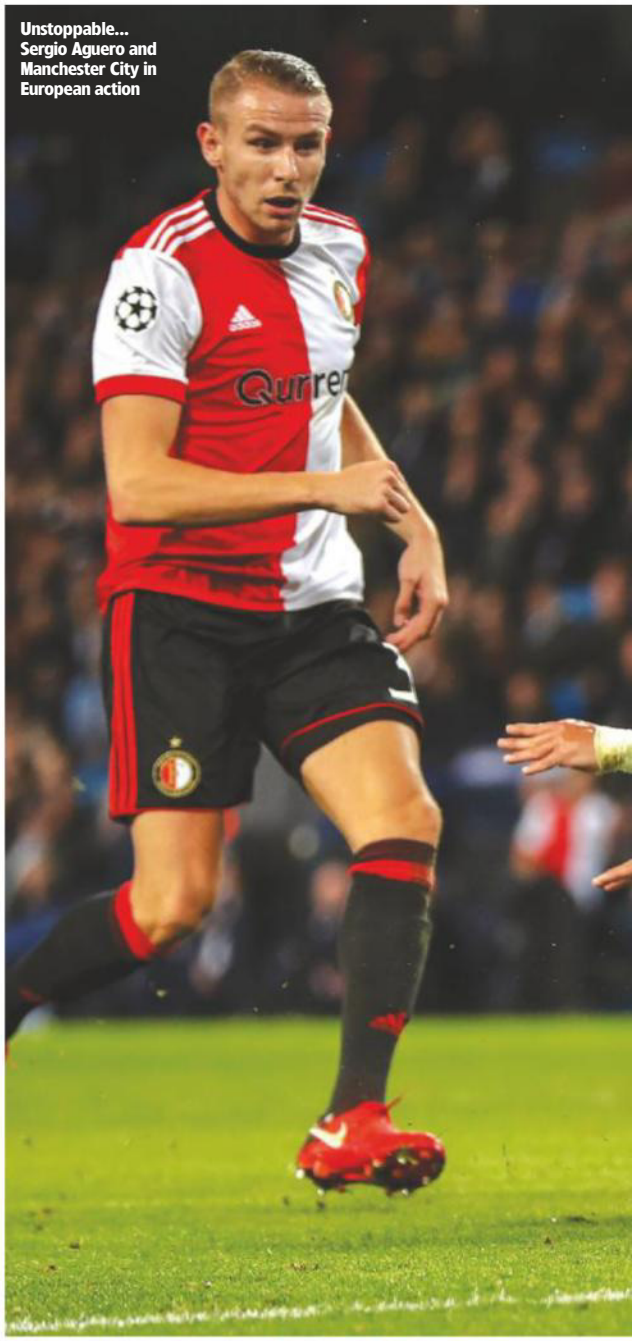
The Fall of the House of FIFA by David Conn
Brilliant account of the culture of corruption and deceit that thrived at world football's governing body.

No Hunger in Paradise
by Michael Calvin
Eye-watering examination of youth football in Britain.

The BIG stories of 2018

...before they happen

Spotlight on some of the key questions facing football over the coming 12 months



Unstoppable... Sergio Aguero and Manchester City in European action

1 WILL ANY OF THE SUCCESSFUL ENGLAND UNDER-20 OR UNDER-17 PLAYERS BREAK INTO THE SENIOR SIDE?

After becoming only the second country – after Brazil – to hold both world under-17 and under-20 titles in the same year, there are high hopes that English football could be on the brink of producing a talented new generation.

But, historically, only a small proportion of players who win world titles at youth level have gone on to star for their senior national sides.

Everton striker Dominic Calvert-Lewin, the scorer of England's winning goal in their under-20 Final triumph over Venezuela in South Korea, is already getting first-team action at club level, as is Dominic Solanke of Liverpool.

From the victorious under-17 side, Phil Foden has made his senior debut for Manchester City, while Jadon Sancho, who left City for Borussia Dortmund last summer, has made his Bundesliga debut.

Breakthrough... Dominic Calvert-Lewin

Manchester City's 4-0 win at Swansea saw them become the first team to win 15 successive games in the English top flight

2 CAN MANCHESTER CITY CONQUER EUROPE?

Pep Guardiola's side were unbeaten in the Premier League after 17 games and are playing some exceptional football. Their 2-1 victory away to Manchester United in early December put clear blue water between themselves and their nearest rivals in the Premier League, which could aid their Champions League campaign, which resumes in February with a round-of-16 tie against Basle.

Trial...Jose Maria Marin (second from left)

5 WHO WILL BE JAILED IN THE FIFAGATE SCANDAL?

Do not expect any let-up in the damaging drip-feed about the length, depth and breadth of the multi-million bribery business that has been allowed to flourish over decades among football bosses and their executive accomplices in the Americas.

November saw the start of the trial of former South American FA presidents Jose Maria Marin of Brazil, Paraguay's Juan Angel Napout and Manuel Burga of Peru, who had all been among the small minority pleading not guilty.

Evidence of the size of the bribes and their frequency was jaw-dropping. Wound in were not only the trio on trial but former FIFA directors Ricardo Teixeira and Marco Polo del Nero, who remain beyond the reach of the US in Brazil.

Teixeira quit football under weight of accusation in 2012 while Del Nero, the non-travelling president of the Brazil federation, was recently banned by FIFA following revelations during the trial.

Perhaps the most damning revelation about the accused men's sense of entitlement was the vain submission by defence lawyers to have the trial of Marin, Napout and Burga voided because "such bribes were not illegal in South America."

Keir Radnedge

3 WHO WILL PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN SELL IN JANUARY?

Last summer's world-record deals to bring in Neymar and Kylian Mbappe have put PSG in danger of breaching UEFA's Financial Fairplay rules and therefore increased the likelihood of some big names being sold in the mid-season transfer window. Julian Draxler and Angel Di Maria are two players who could be sacrificed to help balance the books.

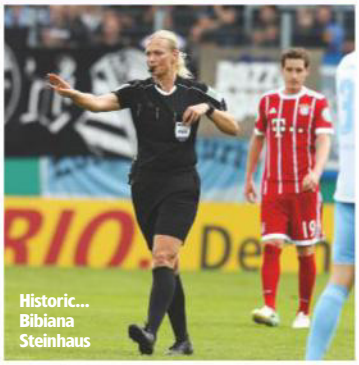
On offer...Julian Draxler (left) and Angel Di Maria

4 WHO WILL SUCCEED JUPP HEYNCKES AS BOSS AT BAYERN MUNICH?

The 72-year-old Heynckes returned to take charge of Bayern in the autumn of 2017 as a stop-gap replacement for sacked coach Carlo Ancelotti until the end of the current season.

Former Borussia Dortmund boss Thomas Tuchel is the favourite to be handed the job in the long term, although Chelsea may turn to him if Antonio Conte returns to Italy.

An interesting name under consideration by the Bayern hierarchy is Hoffenheim's Julian Nagelsmann. However, at the age of just 30, he is probably still a little too raw to be appointed immediately.



Historic... Bibiana Steinhaus

6 WILL ANYONE FOLLOW BIBIANA STEINHAUS AND REFEREE IN THE TOP FLIGHT OF MEN'S FOOTBALL?

Earlier this season Steinhaus became the first female referee to take charge of a Bundesliga match when she was referee in the 1-1 draw between Hertha Berlin and Werder Bremen.

7 WILL IFAB APPROVE VAR FOR THE WORLD CUP?

Imagine it's Germany v Brazil in the World Cup Final on July 15. Mats Hummels and Neymar tangle and the ref shows Hummels a red card. After all the chaos, Hummels heads down the tunnel to the dressing rooms, and the referee is then prompted to consult the video replay screen.

He signals "the square" and heads to the touchline to consult the fourth officials and look at the replay. He looks again, thinks for several moments – and then sends the fourth official to bring Hummels back from the dressing room, back onto the pitch. He shows him a yellow card rather than the earlier red and restarts the game.

Eight years ago, in South Africa, then FIFA president Sepp Blatter understood, after witnessing Frank Lampard's phantom goal against Germany, that technology was essential, admitting: "Around the world we are a laughing stock."

Check...referee Fahad Al Mirdasi reviews video footage

On March 2, in Zurich, the International Football Association Board must decide whether to approve the use of VAR at the World Cup in Russia.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino not only wants it, he has told every regional congress that it will be in place. Yet the trials around the world have produced some concerning outcomes. Most in the game accept that VAR is essential to reduce the number of errors, but live activation continues to raise problems. Some Bundesliga coaches have even suggested that the German trials should be abandoned until issues have been smoothed out.

Shortly before the winter break that embarrassing recall scenario was played out in Bayern Munich's 1-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt, when the latter's midfielder Marius Wolf was reinstated by referee Harm Osmers after being initially sent off.

Wolf had been shown a red card for a challenge on James Rodriguez, but after Osmers reviewed the images he changed his mind and called for Wolf to be brought back from the changing rooms.

At the Confederations Cup trial in Russia there was the strange notion of using different nationalities for the match

and video referees. Surely it is only commonsense that the VAR official, like the two assistant referees, should share the referee's nationality. They need to speak not only the same language but the same football language.

Another issue was the lack of player awareness. As Chile's Arturo Vidal said: "We were told about the system before the tournament, which was fine, but when it happens in the intensity of the match that's completely different."

Officials who work with the system will be more at home with it than even a conversant minority of players from all 32 nations in Russia. But it will not take players "in the know" long to realise the new power in their hands. Vehement protests to a referee may prompt him to consult the VAR for fear that a blunder could cost him his top-level career.

Keir Radnedge

VAR...trialling at the Confederations Cup

Danger... Martin Peters

8 WILL THE GAME CONFRONT THE GROWING SCANDAL OF DEMENTIA?

When Stan Cullis, the former England captain and manager of Wolverhampton Wandererss, was diagnosed with a form of dementia, his daughter, Susan, wrote to the Football Association about the issue. The playing career of Cullis had ended early due to repeated concussions, and she expressed her fears about the issue.

Few men were more famous in English football in his time than Cullis, but the FA did not even bother to reply to the letter.

When Jeff Astle, the former England striker, died at the cruelly early age of 59, the coroner at his inquest ruled that heading footballs had been the cause of his premature death and he categorised it as an "industrial disease".

Again, nobody truly listened. The FA met the Astle family and delivered only sympathy, even though they were aware that many other former players were suffering from Alzheimer's disease and that a link with the sport had to be at least a possibility.

So why was there no interest in investigating further? Was there a fear that football could not cope with the idea that heading the balls could be dangerous, even lethal? Was the fear financial. Could be a monumental compensation bill?

Around the time of Astle's death I talked with PFA players' union chief executive Gordon Taylor and he showed me a huge file the organisation had on the subject and said that a study into the effects of heading footballs on modern players had just begun.

The curiosity was not sustained. The study he spoke of was never completed, and only when the Astle family discovered this did the subject return to the spotlight.

Astle's brain was re-examined in 2014 by Dr Willie Stewart, a specialist in the field, and he discovered the player died of a degenerative brain disease identified as chronic traumatic encephalopathy – a condition traditionally associated with boxers and recently found to be widespread in American gridiron.

Football had to open its eyes. Reports that Martin Peters, Nobby Stiles and Ray Wilson, three of England's 1966 World Cup stars, were suffering from dementia or related problems, tugged the heartstrings. Recently, a powerful BBC documentary by former England striker Alan Shearer shone further public light on the game's neglect.

Now, a serious investigation, led by Dr Stewart, and co-funded by the FA and PFA, will look at the physical and mental health outcomes of around 15,000 former players and compare them to the wider public.

This is a massive breakthrough after so many years of silence.

The consequences may be difficult for football. But, at long last, the game is doing the right thing and confronting its potential demons as it properly should.

Jim Holden

9 WHO WILL BE ITALY'S NEXT NATIONAL COACH?

Under-21 boss Luigi Di Biagio has taken over the *Azzurri* senior side on a temporary basis following the sacking of Gian Pietro Ventura in the wake of their failure to qualify for Russia next summer.

The Italian federation is expected to make a permanent appointment in the summer, with Carlo Ancelotti the early frontrunner. Other names in the frame include Di Biagio, Juventus boss Max Allegri, Roberto Mancini and former national coach Antonio Conte.

Caretaker...Luigi Di Biagio

11 WHO IS GOING TO WIN THE WORLD CUP IN RUSSIA THIS SUMMER?

It is a simple question, but one that is impossible to answer at the moment. Brazil, Germany and Spain will start the tournament as favourites, while Russia must be considered to be one of the weakest nations ever to have hosted the finals.

The Draw

GROUP A
Egypt | Russia | Saudi Arabia | Uruguay

JUNE 14: Russia v Saudi Arabia *(Moscow Luzhniki, 7.45pm)*
JUNE 15: Egypt v Uruguay *(Yekaterinburg, 1pm)*
JUNE 19: Russia v Egypt *(Saint Petersburg, 7pm)*
JUNE 20: Uruguay v Saudi Arabia *(Rostov, 4pm)*
JUNE 25: Saudi Arabia v Egypt *(Volgograd, 3pm)*
JUNE 25: Uruguay v Russia *(Samara, 3pm)*

GROUP B
Iran | Morocco | Portugal | Spain

JUNE 15: Morocco v Iran *(Saint Petersburg, 4pm)*
JUNE 15: Portugal v Spain *(Sochi, 7pm)*
JUNE 20: Portugal v Morocco *(Moscow Luzhniki, 1pm)*
JUNE 20: Iran v Spain *(Kazan, 7pm)*
JUNE 25: Iran v Portugal *(Saransk, 7pm)*
JUNE 25: Spain v Morocco *(Kaliningrad, 7pm)*

GROUP C
Australia | Denmark | France | Peru

JUNE 16: France v Australia *(Kazan, 11am)*
JUNE 16: Peru v Denmark *(Saransk, 5pm)*
JUNE 21: France v Peru *(Yekaterinburg, 1pm)*
JUNE 21: Denmark v Australia *(Samara, 4pm)*
JUNE 26: Australia v Peru *(Sochi, 3pm)*
JUNE 26: Denmark v France *(Moscow Luzhniki, 3pm)*

GROUP D
Argentina | Croatia | Iceland | Nigeria

JUNE 16: Argentina v Iceland *(Moscow Otkrytie, 2pm)*
JUNE 16: Croatia v Nigeria *(Kaliningrad, 8pm)*
JUNE 21: Argentina v Croatia *(Nizhny Novgorod, 7pm)*
JUNE 22: Nigeria v Iceland *(Volgograd, 4pm)*
JUNE 26: Iceland v Croatia *(Rostov-on-Don, 7pm)*
JUNE 26: Nigeria v Argentina *(Saint Petersburg, 7pm)*

GROUP E
Brazil | Costa Rica | Serbia | Switz'land

JUNE 17: Costa Rica v Serbia *(Samara, 1pm)*
JUNE 17: Brazil v Switzerland *(Rostov, 7pm)*
JUNE 22: Brazil v Costa Rica *(Saint Petersburg, 1pm)*
JUNE 22: Serbia v Switzerland *(Kaliningrad, 7pm)*
JUNE 27: Serbia v Brazil *(Moscow Otkrytie, 7pm)*
JUNE 27: Switzerland v Costa Rica *(Nizhny Novgorod, 7pm)*

GROUP F
Germany | Mexico | Sweden | S Korea

JUNE 17: Germany v Mexico *(Moscow Luzhniki, 4pm)*
JUNE 18: Sweden v South Korea *(Nizhny Novgorod, 1pm)*
JUNE 23: Germany v Sweden *(Sochi, 4pm)*
JUNE 23: South Korea v Mexico *(Rostov, 7pm)*
JUNE 27: South Korea v Germany *(Kazan, 3pm)*
JUNE 27: Mexico v Sweden *(Yekaterinburg, 3pm)*

GROUP G
Belgium | England | Panama | Tunisia

JUNE 18: Belgium v Panama *(Sochi, 4pm)*
JUNE 18: Tunisia v England *(Volgograd, 7pm)*
JUNE 23: Belgium v Tunisia *(Moscow Otkrytie, 1pm)*
JUNE 24: England v Panama *(Nizhny Novgorod, 1pm)*
JUNE 28: England v Belgium *(Kaliningrad, 7pm)*
JUNE 28: Panama v Tunisia *(Saransk, 7pm)*

GROUP H
Colombia | Japan | Poland | Senegal

JUNE 19: Poland v Senegal *(Moscow Otkrytie, 1pm)*
JUNE 19: Colombia v Japan *(Saransk, 4p,)*
JUNE 24: Japan v Senegal *(Yekaterinburg, 4pm)*
JUNE 24: Poland v Colombia *(Kazan, 7pm)*
JUNE 28: Japan v Poland *(Volgograd, 3pm)*
JUNE 28: Senegal v Colombia *(Samara, 3pm)*

All set...December's draw in Moscow

ROUND OF 16

JUNE 30: C1 v D2 *(Kazan, 3pm) (1)*
JUNE 30: A1 v B2 *(Sochi, 7pm) (2)*
JULY 1: B1 v A2 *(Moscow Luzhniki, 3pm) (3)*
JULY 1: D1 v C2 *(Nizhny Novgorod, 7pm) (4)*
JULY 2: E1 v F2 *(Samara, 3pm) (5)*
JULY 2: G1 v H2 *(Rostov, 7pm) (6)*
JULY 3: F1 v E2 *(Saint Petersburg, 3pm) (7)*
JULY 3: H1 v G2 *(Moscow Otkrytie, 7pm) (8)*

QUARTER-FINALS

JULY 6: Winner 6 v Winner 2 *(Nizhny Novgorod, 3pm) (1)*

Holders...Germany boss Joachim Low lifts the World Cup in 2014

JULY 6: Winner 5 v Winner 6 *(Kazan, 7pm) (2)*
JULY 7: Winner 7 v Winner 8 *(Samara, 1pm) (3)*
JULY 7: Winner 3 v Winner 4 *(Sochi, 7pm) (4)*

SEMI-FINALS

JULY 10: Winner QF1 v Winner QF 2 *(Saint Petersburg, 7pm)*
JULY 11: Winner QF3 v Winner QF 4 *(Moscow Luzhniki, 7pm)*

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF

JULY 14: *Saint Petersburg, 3pm*

FINAL

JULY 15: *Moscow Luzhniki, 4pm*

● *all kick-off times are GMT*

12 WILL THE SPECTRE OF DOPING HAUNT THE WORLD CUP?

Three years after the revelatory German television documentaries on Russian doping, the accusations rumble on.

Initially it was track and field athletics, weightlifting and winter sports which took centre stage. However, a report compiled for the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) by Canadian law professor Richard McLaren in 2016 indicated at least 30 suspect samples from players in Russian football. Last June he raised the total of suspect samples by five times.

McLaren said: "There are 155 [football] samples awaiting analysis which were seized by WADA. We also reported those to FIFA." His suspicion is that these urine samples were either manipulated to prevent positive test results or that doping substances will be found in them.

German TV channel ARD questioned former international Vladyslav Vashchuk, who played for Moscow Spartak in 2003 when club-mate Yegor Titov was banned for failing a dope test after a Euro qualifier against Wales.

Vashchuk said: "Soon after that samples were taken from the entire Spartak team and they all tested positive." He remembered taking "some small pills". After the positive tests the players attended the Russian cosmonaut training centre where their blood was "purified".

Power...(left to right) Mutko, Putin and FIFA boss Gianni Infantino

Further reports have suggested that players from Russia's national squad at the 2014 World Cup were being investigated, though no Russian tested positive at the finals in Brazil.

The man with all the answers appears to be Vitaly Mutko, a long-time acolyte of president Vladimir Putin who was promoted to deputy prime minister from sports minister after persuading the IOC to allow most Russian competitors to compete at Rio 2016.

Mutko is also head of the Russian Football Union and president of the 2018 World Cup local organising committee.

On the morning of the World Cup draw, he delivered a lengthy rant in defence of Russian sport, saying it had nothing to answer for: "If I perform a Russian dance will you stop asking these questions?"

Do not expect to witness his happy feet on the dance floor until long after the World Cup. If ever.

Keir Radnedge

In League C... Lithuania (in yellow) and Scotland

13 WILL THE NATIONS LEAGUE BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY?

UEFA's Nations League will offer a qualification route to the Euro 2020 finals. Four play-offs places will be contested by the 16 Nations League group winners. If a group winner has already qualified via the Euro qualifiers, their spot will go to the next best-ranked team in their league.

The four group winners from League A will meet in a finals mini-tournament in June 2019 to become the UEFA Nations League winners.

League A will have four groups of three, made up of Germany, Portugal, Belgium and Spain (pot 1); France, England, Switzerland and Italy (pot 2); and Poland, Iceland, Croatia and Holland (pot 3).

League B will also have four groups of three from: Austria, Wales, Russia, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine, Republic of Ireland, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Denmark, Czech Republic and Turkey.

League C will have one group of three and three groups of four from Hungary, Romania, Scotland, Slovenia, Greece, Serbia, Albania, Norway, Montenegro, Israel, Bulgaria, Finland, Cyprus, Estonia, and Lithuania.

League D will be split into four groups of four from Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Latvia, Faroe Islands, Luxembourg, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Liechtenstein, Malta, Andorra, Kosovo, San Marino and Gibraltar.

The draw will be held on January 24.

6 of the best

Stars of 2018

Players who can make their mark in the next 12 months

1 Adrian SEMPER

DINAMO ZAGREB

Towering keeper who is tipped to swap his native Croatia for the Bundesliga or Premier League in the not-too distant future, with RB Leipzig thought to be particularly interested. Having come up through the academy system at Dinamo, he made his Champions League debut at 18, against Lyon in September 2016. And to ensure a regular diet of first-team football he has been featuring on loan for the last 12 months at Lokomotiva, who are Dinamo's top-flight satellite club. A fan of Bayern Munich and Germany keeper Manuel Neuer, he is similarly composed under pressure, has sharp reflexes and command of his box. He attributes much of his success to regular sessions with a sports psychologist, working on his concentration and visualization techniques.

2 WENDEL

FLUMINENSE

Rumoured to be on the verge of a €10million switch to Paris Saint-Germain, the 20-year-old box-to-box specialist from the Rio state city of Duque de Caixas only made his Brazilian championship debut early last year, but he has developed into one of the most-praised young midfielders in Brazil, along with Gremio's Arthur. Technically assured and with a blistering shot in his right boot, he is unlikely to be incorporated into the PSG squad straightaway and they would probably send him out on loan for six months, possibly to Porto or Sporting in Portugal. He can, at times, be a little too laid-back for his own good, repeatedly turning up late for training and finding himself dropped for the Rio derby against Flamengo in October. "He has to learn to abide by the rules," declared Fluminense coach Abel. "If he doesn't, he's no use to us."

3 Dimitri OBERLIN

RED BULL SALZBURG

Is it any wonder that so many European directors of football are busy pouring over scouting reports on the Swiss under-21 striker? On a season loan at Basle, the Cameroon-born striker was one of the chief reasons his club qualified for the knockout phase of the Champions League, catching the eye with his speed, power and four goals. A Swiss resident since the age of nine, he was brought up in the western Vaud canton but learned his trade in the youth academy at Zurich. While there he turned down an offer to join Manchester United. Up until this season, two factors had impeded his development: a propensity for injury and ill-discipline. Nor did his family especially help, with his mother often turning up at Zurich to demand answers when he was not picked for the first-team.

4 Lautaro MARTINEZ

RACING

There was a sense of inevitability when the Argentinian striker recently agreed to join Atletico Madrid for the start of next season and become part of a squad full of fellow South American talent. Known as *El Toro* (The Bull), the 20-year-old has spent the last 12 months seriously enhancing his reputation, shining with Argentina's under-20s at the South American Championship in Ecuador, nailing down a place in the Racing starting line-up and emerging as one of the most effective front men in the Primera Division. Rumours abound in Argentina that he is on the cusp of his first full cap.

5 Kepa ARRIZABALAGA

ATHLETIC BILBAO

The 23-year-old recently made his international debut in a 5-0 friendly victory over Costa Rica and in doing so became the eighth Bilbao keeper to pull on the gloves for Spain. With only a few months left on his current contract he is widely expected to sign for Real Madrid, where he will be hoping to supplant Keylor Navas as the side's number one. Crucially, he did not appear in any of Bilbao's Europa League ties this autumn which means, should he sign in January for Real, he would be eligible for Champions League duty. The Madrid giants have had their eye on him for quite some time, trying but failing to recruit him for their B team back in 2013. With Athletic from the age of 10, he has been a first-teamer there for the past 18 months, prior to which he played in the second tier on loan at Ponferradina and Valladolid.

6 Jean-Michael SERI

NICE

After coming within a whisker of striking a deal last summer with either Barcelona or Paris Saint-Germain, the Ivorian playmaker is now even more determined to make a beeline for the Allianz Riviera exit. According to French sources, the Nice board rate him in the €45million bracket, and even though Barca and PSG remain in the hunt, a more likely destination for the 26-year-old is the upper echelons of the Premier League. Ex-Barcelona maestro Xavi says of him: "It's not every day you see such a talent in midfield. He has that Barcelona DNA. He's fantastic." Which is quite a testimonial for a player who, back in 2013, was deemed to be surplus to requirements at Porto.

eye witness

Steve Menary reports

MALTA

Fighting the fixers

New moves to clean up the Maltese game

From an infamous Euro 84 qualifier in which Spain needed to win by 11 goals to qualify and beat Malta 12-1, to a 2007 game with Norway after which midfielder Kevin Sammut was handed a lifetime ban, Maltese football has been dogged by allegations of corruption and match-fixing for years.

Although nothing was ever proven about the Spain rout, the Malta Football Association (MFA) decided to take action and compiled a 500-page dossier, after conducting more than 30 interviews, and this was instrumental in Sammut's ban. But when the problems persisted, MFA integrity officer Franz Tabone decided to call out the fixers.

In 2015, in his regular newsletter, Tabone wrote: "Match-fixing, in which some individuals in our football have been meddling in for years, has grown to such an extent that the general public considers all our matches to be of a dubious nature.

"The public are now also aware of the other scam which allegedly some of our clubs are involved in.

"These clubs finance their entire operation by manipulating matches, betting on them, and the winnings going towards the club whilst also lining their own pockets."

Tabone could have been sued – or even worse, given the criminal elements involved – but nothing happened and the game has remained a target for fixers.

The following year, an under-21 match against Lithuania and a Maltese Premier League game between Pembroke Athleta and Mosta were targeted, with FIFPro – the international players' union – claiming that one in six players in the country's top flight had been approached by fixers.

By now, Malta's then-sports minister David Agius had become involved – and he had personal experience of fixing, with his house being bombed when he was a child after his father, a former FIFA referee, refused to fix a game.

According to Aguis: "Fixing has ▸

Empty seats...fans (above) watch Gzira United take on Mosta (in white, left)

77
78
79
80
10

changed. Before, we had corruption because one club wanted to win a particular title and would do whatever it takes to win. Now it's deeper.

"The cost to run a club is much, much more than before – the wages, the operation – but the income is minimal unless you qualify for Europe. So where is the money coming from?

"We used to say this in the pubs, but no one officially ever said it in authority.

"When Franz wrote this, either the clubs have to tell Mr Tabone he is saying something that is libel or he has reasons to say what he is saying. So I took this to parliament."

The results were a cross-party, anti-corruption task force – supported by the MFA and other sports bodies, the Maltese gaming industry, and the police – that has drawn up new legislation.

Denied...Malta keeper Andrew Hogg stops England's Harry Kane (far right)

And although Agius is now on the shadow benches after his party were ousted in the 2017 general election, new sports minister Clifton Grima has promised a swathe of tougher sanctions.

Like Agius, Grima has personal experience. A decade ago he took over as secretary of Sliema Wanderers and on his first day he was approached by one of his club's players who confided that he had been targeted by fixers.

Agius and Grima may face each other across the chamber but both are confident that the bill will pass to update old legislation dating back to 1976. New penalties include a five-year prison sentence for a first offence and confiscation of assets gained through fixing, while the Maltese police will be encouraged to pursue cases abroad.

Grima says there will be even greater punishment for Maltese players who have represented their country, while whistle-blowers will be protected.

For Tabone, this is key, and he argues. "Match-fixing is a crime, like drugs, so why not have protection of witnesses for match-fixing? You always need witnesses to go all the way."

Young players, often from abroad, can be too frightened to talk to anyone if targeted. But a players' union, which was formed in 2011 and accredited to FIFPro in 2014, was not included in the task force despite having over 500 members.

The union has made changes, with the maximum wage of €1,200 a month for a full-time player and €350 for semi-pros abolished in 2015. Wages have since spiralled, with some players earning up to €5,000 a month, while money has also been lavished on facilities – although now it is through legitimate means.

The Centenary Stadium and the Victor Tedesco Stadium both boast the latest synthetic surfaces, while Hibernians Stadium and the Ta'Qali National Stadium have top-quality grass pitches, and all of this was funded by the MFA with help from UEFA and FIFA.

For clubs, there is little income apart from gate money, with tickets costing around €8 and last season's biggest attendance being 5,500 for Valletta versus Floriana.

However, the introduction of a new sports commercialisation law should help the clubs to make money, and it has already attracted some foreign investors. Four of the Premier League's 14 clubs are currently controlled by overseas investors, although these foreign owners are mostly viewed with suspicion.

Syrian businessman Yahya Kirdi was linked with a takeover of Liverpool in 2010, then Vicenza, before 21 months of negotiations to buy Carlisle United collapsed in spring 2017. A mooted bid for English non-league side Morpeth Town also came to nothing before the Montreal-based businessman bought Naxxar Lions.

The most recent takeover was at Senglea Athletic – by an Italian

National stadium...Ta'Qali has a capacity of just under 17,000

Movers & Shakers

Ref's son...Agius

FRANZ TABONE
Integrity officer at the MFA and a controversial figure in Maltese football for his efforts in tackling the match-fixers.

DAVID AGIUS
The son of a FIFA referee, he formed a task force on corruption. Is the shadow minister for sport after his Nationalist Party lost this summer's election.

Coach...Saintfiet

CARLO MAMO
Former international defender who is now general-secretary of the players' union.

TOM SAINTFIET
Much-travelled Belgian who took over as Malta's national coach in October 2017.

Veteran...Mifsud

MICHAEL MIFSUD
Veteran international striker who played for Kaiserslautern, Coventry City and Barnsley. Back in Malta with Valletta after a spell in Australia's A-League.

Europa League... Valletta (in white) take on Utrecht

investment group led by Swiss-based real-estate analyst Nicola Davolio – and they surprisingly won promotion last term under the presidency of Reuben Debono.

"In the last four years we have gone from the bottom to the top and the Premier League is too much for me alone," says Debono. "The consortium are buying and selling properties and flipping them, and investing in football, which is good for us.

"They are investing in players who are getting on the pitch in the EU. After two or three years, it will be easier for these Argentinian, Brazilian and Colombian players to move on.

"It's like gambling. You buy young players and then hope they do well."

Clubs can only field seven non-Maltese players but they want this abolished in return for a controversial rule that sees part-time players tied to their clubs even when a contract ends.

Most of the foreign players are full-time while the Maltese are part-time – and that presents a challenge for Malta's new national coach, Tom Saintfiet.

The Belgian has worked all across the world, from Namibia and Togo to Bangladesh, but at 44, and with a young family, he is finally putting down some roots. He has a home on the Maltese island of Gozo and has big plans for Malta after signing a contract until the end of the Euro 2020 qualifiers.

"The federation is very well organised and the structure is good, the only limit is the playing resources," he says.

Saintfiet has made immediate changes and insisted on his players joining the team camp much earlier than before ahead of his first game in charge, which ended in a 3-0 loss at home to Estonia.

Tough... sports minister Clifton Grima

Only a handful of Maltese play overseas and all, such as Luke Gamblin at Luton Town in England's fourth tier and Jean Paul Farrugia at Chiasso in Switzerland, play at a low level. As a result, Saintfiet has recruited a head scout, Faizal Khan, to scour the Maltese diaspora in Australia, Canada, the UK and the USA for players. An Anglo-Guyanese former football agent, Khan previously unearthed a swathe of experienced players who took Guyana to the penultimate round of the 2014 CONCACAF World Cup qualifiers.

Saintfiet hopes to shake up Maltese football and only needs five points to equal the country's best-ever return in a European or World Cup qualifying campaign.

> "Match-fixing is a crime, like drugs, so why not have protection of witnesses for match-fixing?"
> **Franz Tabone**

The national side managed just one point, from a 1-1 home draw with Lithuania in their 2018 World Cup campaign, but there are stirrings of progress in the youth sides.

Malta hosted the 2014 European Under-17 Championship, and although the hosts lost all three of their games they did gain valuable experience. A core of that side has since moved up to the under-21 side, who surpassed all expectations by taking 11 points in the 2017 Euro Under-21 qualifiers.

Saintfiet's first major international job in Europe is a chance to show what he can do with decent facilities and the right players – if he can keep them out of the tentacles of the fixers.

With changes afoot, can football in Malta rise from its current nadir? **WS**

High tech...Centenary Stadium has an artificial pitch

Maltese Premier League 2017-18

BALZAN Backed by Anton Tagliaferro, they were runners-up last season and entered this term's Europa League qualifiers, where they lost 5-3 on aggregate to Hungary's Videoton under new coach Marco Micovic.

BIRKIRKARA From Malta's most populous town, the club won four titles, the last of which was in 2013. Frank Zarb took over as president in June 2017 after his predecessor, lawyer Adrian Delia, went into politics.

FLORIANA Winner of 25 titles and run by Riccardo Gaucci, the son of Luciano, the former owner of Catania and Perugia. Ex-Palermo coach Giovanni Tedesco took over in 2016 and they held Red Star Belgrade 3-3 at home in this year's Europa League qualifiers.

GZIRA UNITED Returned to the Premier League last season after winning the First Division in 2016. The chairman is former player Sharlon Pace.

HAMRUN SPARTANS Founded in 1907, they have been champions seven times, although not since 1991. President is Gejtu Debattista and the club's golden period was in the 1980s, when they twice won through rounds in Europe.

HIBERNIANS Title winners in two of the last three seasons and reigning champions, they beat Estonia's FCI Tallin in this year's Champions League before going out to Red Bull Salzburg.

LIJA ATHLETIC Won the First Division last season, but facing a battle this term to avoid an immediate return.

MOSTA Promoted to the Premier League in 2001 but have made little impact since. Only stayed up last season after winning a relegation play-off.

NAXXAR LIONS Third in the second-tier last term but promoted after the Premier League was expanded for this season. Yahya Kirdi took over in 2017 and promised a €10m investment but they have struggled this campaign.

SENGLEA ATHLETIC Promoted after finishing First Division runners-up last time out and now funded by an Italian investment group.

SLIEMA WANDERERS Malta's most successful club with 26 titles and coached by former international defender John Buttigieg, who played in England for Brentford.

ST ANDREWS Part of the Luxol Sports Club, president Paul Falzon is a former water polo goalkeeper. The club has a highly regarded youth system.

TARXIEN RAINBOWS From south-east Malta, the club have played in the Premier League since 2008.

VALLETTA The giants of Maltese football with 23 league titles, most recently in 2016. After beating Folgore of San Marino, they lost to Utrecht of Holland in this season's Europa League.

Glenn Moore

Kansas move to Utah

Two-time title winners become Royals

Happier times... Kansas City celebrate

Kansas City scored the very first goal in the National Women's Soccer League, with a left-footed, near-post shot from 22-year-old Mexican international Renae Cuellar just three minutes into the opening game at Shawnee Mission High School Stadium, Kansas.

That was back in April 2013 and the location was indicative of the baby steps that were taken in an effort to ensure America's third attempt at establishing a national women's competition was more sustainable than the previous two.

That goal has been achieved, with NWSL having just completed its fifth season and outlasting its failed predecessors. City's opponents that day, Portland Thorns, have gone on to establish the best-supported women's team in the world and are the current NWSL champions. Kansas themselves won the title in 2014 and 2015.

There have, however, been bumps along the way and the latest was fatal for Kansas City. Struggling to translate success into support, the club ceased operations in late November. Their NWSL place, and all playing staff, were reacquired by the league, then transferred to Salt Lake City, 1,000 miles west in Utah, where they will form a new franchise, Utah Royals.

Significantly, they will come under the wing of Real Salt Lake, a well-established MLS team. Utah will also play at the soccer-specific 20,000-capacity Rio Tinto Stadium. This means that half the league are now associated with professional men's clubs: four with MLS teams and North Carolina Courage with USL's North Carolina. To further underline the league's ongoing financial issues, the latter were formed after the 2016 champions, Rochester-based New York Western Flash, sold their franchise slot.

> Half the NWSL teams are now associated with professional men's clubs: four with MLS teams and North Carolina Courage with USL's North Carolina

One person who will not be moving to the Mormon capital is Vlatko Andonovski, who has been Kansas' coach throughout their existence. The Macedonian will instead take charge of NWSL rivals Seattle Reign, the defeated championship Final team in both of Kansas' title-winning campaigns. In a further twist, the beaten coach on both occasions, Laura Harvey, will become Utah's first coach.

Utah boss...Harvey

Harvey had been a strong candidate to replace sacked England manager Mark Sampson in her native country having just quit Reign, in part because she had a new role with the US set-up. Harvey said she felt the "time was not right" for the England job and the US Soccer post was not as anticipated. Nevertheless, there is an escape clause in her contract were a national-team job to become available and she wanted to take it.

Harvey will lead a club which will have greater resources than Reign and would seem to have more chance of embedding itself in the game than Kansas had. For that inaugural match, Kansas attracted 6,784 fans and they would only fitfully match that figure again, despite their success. The average gate in their first season was 4,626 but by last season it was a league-lowest 1,788. That is clearly not sustainable and there had already been one change of ownership. The new buyers were Minneapolis-based and initial talk of commitment soon faded. With the local MLS club, Sporting Kansas City, reluctant to take on the franchise the team was dissolved. By contrast, Utah can tap into the Real Salt Lake fanbase, facilities and staffing.

Harvey's swift return to the bench trebles the number of female coaches in NWSL after four seasons in which she has been the only one. Houston Dash signed up Vera Pauw, former coach to Scotland, her native Holland, Russia and South Africa. Sky Blue, of New Jersey, recruited Denise Reddy, formerly assistant at Washington Spirit and coach,

a decade ago, of Sky Blue's predecessor, second-tier Jersey Sky Blue.

The other intriguing development in the USA is Sunil Gulati's decision to stand down as president of US Soccer after 12 years. Gulati has been a significant figure in raising the profile of, and investment into, the women's game both in the US and FIFA, though some feel he could have done more given his influence. The most unexpected and intriguing candidate of those jockeying to take over is Hope Solo. The 36-year-old's 202-cap stellar international career ended last year when US Soccer terminated the goalkeeper's contract for misconduct.

Whoever takes over will note events south of the border where Liga MX Femenil completed a very successful debut campaign. The competition arose after clubs in the men's league were mandated to run a women's team. From slow beginnings the league took off with fans pressuring clubs to take it seriously, television becoming engaged, and the two-legged Final of the Torneo Apertura capturing the imagination. A combined attendance exceeding 60,000 watched Guadalajara, trailing 2-0 from the first leg, beat Pachua 3-2 on aggregate.

Mexican Final... Brenda Viramontes of Guadalajara

Even with women admitted free to the second leg, that was impressive. The four semi-final games aggregated 43,383 and while the regular season gates only averaged 2,743 that is more than twice that achieved by England's Women's Super League.

Controversially, in the first season only Mexican-born players were permitted, with only two over 23 in age. This should improve the selection base for the national team and is one reason wages are very low, but allowing more foreigners (including US-born Mexicans) and older players would surely raise the quality. That might pave the way for US-Mexican club matches and, ultimately, a CONCACAF women's Champions League to run alongside the men's. WS

Round-up

YOUTH MOVE FOR SUNDHAGE

Having stepped down from coaching Sweden, Pia Sundhage is to work with the country's youth teams. Sundhage won Olympic gold twice with the US and led Sweden to the 2016 Final. Elsewhere, Londoner Tony Readings has stood down as coach to New Zealand.

Youth... Sundhage

NEYMAR AND 1,693 WOMEN

The first edition of the Global Sports Salaries Survey to include sportswomen revealed just under one per cent of the world professional footballers were female, an estimated total of 1,287. The survey suggested Feminine Division 1, bolstered by salaries paid by Lyon (€162,000-a-year on average) and Paris Saint-Germain, was the best paid league (€42,188/US$49,782), though many players at other teams are amateur. The French competition was followed by those of Germany, England (£26,752/$35,355), USA ($27,054), Sweden, Australia and Mexico ($2,184). At an estimated £32.8m the combined salaries of the 1,693 players in these seven leagues (professional and amateur) were, it noted, roughly equal to that of one male footballer, Neymar.

AUSSIE IN AT ARSENAL

Having parted company with Spanish manager Pedro Losa Martinez after a poor start to the season, Arsenal appointed Joe Montemurro. A back-to-back title winner in his native Australia with Melbourne City, he played in Italy in his early 20s and has a UEFA Pro Licence. Montemurro will have to do without Euro 2017 top scorer Jodie Taylor who is leaving to join Seattle Reign, via a loan to Melbourne City.

Gunner...Joe Montemurro

BERGER SHOCK

Birmingham City's German goalkeeper Ann-Katrin Berger shocked team-mates when she revealed she is suffering from thyroid cancer and requires surgery. Berger, 27, was due to undergo surgery in December. She previously played for Turbine Potsdam and Paris Saint-Germain.

Shock... Ann-Katrin Berger

DENMARK PAY DEAL

After going on strike, forcing the forfeiture of a World Cup qualifier with Sweden, Danish players agreed an improved pay and conditions contract with their federation. Sweden were awarded a 3-0 win.

High earners...Lyon (in white) and Paris Saint-Germain

MISCELLANEOUS

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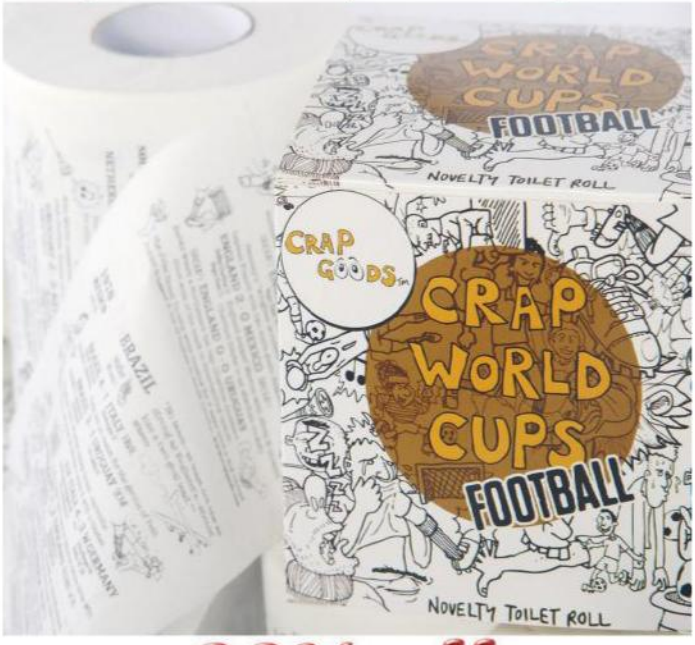

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Club World Cup

KEIR RADNEDGE

Review

Europe win again

Third world title in four years for Real Madrid

Real Madrid managed to maintain their stranglehold on the FIFA Club World Cup at an uncertain time for the world federation's sole underwhelming venture into the club game.

Zinedine Zidane's champions of Europe and Spain retained their grip on the world title and were triumphant for a third time in four years, beating South American title-holders Gremio of Brazil more comfortably in Abu Dhabi than the 1-0 scoreline might suggest. Outclassed South America sides have now won only one of the last 11 Finals.

However, a continuing lack of enthusiasm from Europe and its broadcasters raises questions about FIFA president Gianni Infantino's idea of an expanded club world championship, one that may perhaps be held every four years as a replacement for the equally dubious Confederations Cup.

Ultimately, football competitions stand or fall by the credibility of the event rather than the need of governing bodies for platforms to reassure sponsors about visibility value for money. And this is even more urgent for FIFA after the refusal of major multinationals to engage with the World Cup in the wake of the firestorm of scandal.

FIFA Council will shortly review the federation's competitive structure. A possible merger but greater frequency of youth tournaments is on the agenda as the governing body tries to balance more competitive activity without adding to the pressure on players and upsetting clubs who are already suspicious of what is around the calendar corner.

One possibility would be slotting a club championship into the summer in the "off" years between the World Cups and Euros. This would kill off the Confederations Cup while still providing the upcoming World Cup host nation with its pre-finals event.

A starting date is another issue since the Club World Cup in December has already been pencilled in as the warm-up event in 2021 for the winter World Cup in Qatar.

Expanding the Club World Cup into a 16-team championship will not please Europe but the rest of the international game will love it. Given that Infantino wants to stand for re-election next year, the prospects are positive.

In the meantime, the Club World Cup rolls on, unsatisfactorily – except, of course, for Real Madrid and Cristiano Ronaldo, who continued to rattle up their achievement records. The world player of the year struck the lone, winning goal in the Final, striking after 53 minutes, though he had to concede the player of the tournament award to team-mate Luka Modric.

Earlier, Pachuca of Mexico beat local UAE club Al Jazira 4-1 in the third-place play-off.

Madrid also won the fairplay trophy, though how this – and Modric's prize – can be assessed is questionable after they only rocked up for the last two games when the tournament was already under way.

Ronaldo, when asked about a contract extension, said: "I would really like to but I am not the one who runs the club, that is for those in charge." This may also depend on Madrid's ambition, with an eye to the post-Ronaldo era, of bringing Neymar back to La Liga from Paris Saint-Germain.

Ronaldo is Madrid's all-time leading scorer with 434 goals in 414 games and he, is, for president Florentino Perez at least, a worthy heir to the pioneering glories inspired by Alfredo Di Stefano in the 1950s.

Perez said: "I watched Di Stefano from when I was a kid and Cristiano is the successor to him. This is a different Madrid but Cristiano has marked an era with his commitment and leadership.

"It is difficult to find players like Cristiano. Not just for his talent or his

Triumphant...skipper Sergio Ramos with the Club World Cup

> "I watched Di Stefano from when I was a kid and Cristiano is the successor to him"
> Real Madrid president Florentino Perez

In control...Real Madrid's Marcelo (in white) holds off Ramiro of Gremio

technique but his ambition."

This was Madrid's sixth world title yet, possibly, they had a more testing time in the semi-finals when forced to come back from a goal down to local side Al Jazira. Then it took second-half goals from Ronaldo and a fit-at-last Gareth Bale to overcome a pre-interval shock from Romarinho. Gremio edged Pachuca 1-0 in extra time in the other semi.

FIFA used video assistance, ahead of a March decision on its World Cup application from the International Board, but the jury remains out after irritation among players in the UAE and continuing trial issues in Germany and Italy.

In the Final, five minutes after scoring what proved to be the decisive free-kick, Ronaldo was wrongly denied a second goal after a linesman flagged a non-existent offside against Karim Benzema who had provided the assist. Mexican referee Cesar Ramos ignored Madrid protests to consult the VAR.

Gremio complained they had deserved a review of a penalty claim against Sergio Ramos, while Madrid were also upset that Brazilian defender Pedro Geromel escaped punishment for an early studs-up tackle on Ronaldo. This followed a number of time-consuming referrals in Madrid's semi-final against Al Jazira.

"In some aspects it helps but it causes a lot of confusion," admitted Modric, while Bale added: "I don't like it, to be honest. I think football is better without it. But that's just my opinion. Others make the decision, not me."

Over to IFAB and FIFA then – and not only on VAR. WS

Outnumbered...Yosuke Kashiwagi of Urawa Red Diamonds against Wydad

Brazil

TIM VICKERY

Corinthians cruise to the title

Success was rarely in doubt

Viewed by many as only the fourth-best team in their own state – behind Palmeiras, Santos and Sao Paulo – Corinthians won a title that few would have predicted at the start of 2017.

With the burden of still paying for a stadium that was built for the 2014 World Cup, financial problems meant that no big-name coach was available, so Fabio Carille was left to head up a campaign that promised little.

However, after the Sao Paulo state title in May, Corinthians took a new-found confidence into the national championship and built up a big lead

Success... Corinthians skipper Cassio lifts the trophy

by the halfway mark in a season of extraordinary consistency.

Having taken charge in September 2016, Carille inherited a club that – under predecessors Mano Menezes and, before him, current national-team boss Tite – has consolidated a method of play. Where most Brazilian teams are strung out all over the pitch, Corinthians stay compact, attacking and defending in a block. Without any truly outstanding individual stars they created numerical superiority where it counted during the campaign and gave Jo the support that most rival centre-forwards were lacking.

The dynamism of Rodriguinho and the passing of Jadson were important in the midfield, while Fagner and Guilherme Arana – who joins Seviila in January – were an effective pair of attacking full-backs, and a defensive line organised by the Paraguay's Fabian Balbuena gave solid protection to goalkeeper Cassio.

So dominant were Corinthians in the first half of the campaign that the competition effectively gave up. Gremio, who looked likely to be their closest challengers, gave priority to the domestic cup and the Libertadores, the latter of which they ended up winning, and spent much of the league campaign fielding understrength sides. It was a similar story with Santos, who ended the year empty-handed and Cruzeiro, who could at least look back on winning the Brazilian Cup.

Defending champions Palmeiras were a disappointment and Cuca returned as coach after the club tired of his replacement, Eduardo Baptista. But he too failed to work the previous term's magic and he was replaced by assistant Alberto Valentim, who radically altered the style of play, bringing in a higher defensive line.

Triumphant... Chapecoense

Corinthians, who had barely been tested in the first half of the season, did have a wobble and their lead at the top, which had reached double figures, began to be whittled away. And with Palmeiras picking up points, it looked at one point as though a close finish was in prospect.

As October turned to November, Palmeiras had a chance to take the lead. A win at home to Cruzeiro in the Monday night game, followed by victory in the derby against Corinthians the following Sunday would force a change at the top. But while Valentim's high line had Palmeiras more compact and better in possession, a lack of defensive pace was exploited by Cruzeiro in a 2-2 draw, and then targeted by Corinthians in an exciting 3-2 win.

> So dominant were Corinthians that the competition effectively gave up

After 32 of the 38 rounds, the title race was effectively over. Palmeiras fell to another defeat in their next game and Corinthians wrapped up the title with several games to spare.

In truth, it wasn't a great season and things were not helped by the number of clubs fielding weakened sides. It had been hoped that stretching the domestic cup and the Libertadores over the entire year would do away with this practice. But with job security for Brazilian coaches as precarious as ever, time and again the choice was made to give priority to the immediate knockout game over the long haul of the league.

Sacked... Rogerio Ceni

The low standard did, however, play a part in one of the most heart-warming stories of the year.

Following the air disaster that wiped out the club's coaching staff, almost all of their players and many of the directors, Chapecoense were among the favourites to go down. The idea was floated that they should be protected them relegation for a couple of years to give them time to rebuild, but they were quick to dismiss any such notion, wanting to stand or fall on their own merits.

After a bright start they were in danger of falling, but in the end, after getting through three coaches, they pulled away from danger with such ease that, by virtue of a goal right at the end of their final match, they will be in the qualifying rounds of next year's Libertadores Cup – which is a mighty achievement.

At one point Sao Paulo were in relegation danger, with club legend Rogerio Ceni's first experience as a coach far from a success. Not helped by the sale of several players, he was sacked and Dorival Junior was brought in to shepherd the club to safety, boosted enormously by the return from Europe of former international midfielder Hernanes.

The southern pair of Coritiba and Avai, did go down, along with Ponte Preta and Atletico Goianense. Just avoiding the drop were north-eastern teams Vitoria and Sport – which is good news for the national development of a game which continues to be weighted heavily towards the south-east and the south.

Next season the top tier's northern quota will be boosted by the arrival of Ceara, who were promoted along with Parana and two sides who bounced back at the first attempt: second-tier champions America Mineiro and southern giants Internacional. WS

Winners...Cruzeiro (in blue) get the better of Flamengo in the Cup Final

SEASON'S BEST

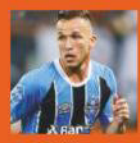
Player Of The Year

JO (Corinthians)
The league's joint-top scorer and the focal point of the Corinthians attack, he was sharp and motivated – and had many calling for his international recall.

Coach Of The Year

FABIO CARILLE (Corinthians)
Although his credentials were questioned at the start of the campaign, he is a shrewd strategist who has clearly learned plenty from watching Tite.

Newcomer Of The Year



ARTHUR (Gremio)
Made a dramatic impact as a midfielder with the touch of a prototype Andres Iniesta about him. It's small wonder that Barcelona are interested.

USA

PAUL GARDNER

Review

MLS still thriving

Toronto top another promising season

Can things really keep on getting better and better for MLS? Every year commissioner Don Garber delivers an upbeat State of the League report, every year he tells of new teams, new stadiums, more sponsors, increased TV viewing and record-breaking attendance.

Two new teams, Minnesota United and Atlanta United, were added in 2017, two new stadiums have been opened, MLS was a pioneer with its adoption of VAR and a new attendance record was set with an average of 22,000 fans per game. And then, surely, the unarguable proof that MLS is making it big-time, with the respected money magazine *Forbes* rating an average MLS team as worth $225million, which is 20 per cent higher than last year's rating.

But all of that is nothing but stats. Behind each of these positives there are even more encouraging stories.

Take Atlanta, for instance. A huge success – "which I have to say," admitted Garber, "was unanticipated" – at the gate, but a new MLS record of 38,200 per game hides a treasure trove of good news for the league.

For a start, newcomers Atlanta did the unthinkable and hired a top-level South American coach in former Barcelona boss Gerardo Martino. Suddenly a direct pathway to Latino talent – so lacking to the average MLS' predominantly non-Hispanic coaches – was opened up. In particular, the Argentinian knew a lot about Paraguayan players, having been national coach there.

Atlanta's owners were willing to spend big money and back his choices, agreeing a deal for the highly rated Oscar Romero. However, just as the local media was announcing Romero's imminent arrival, Martino was gazzumped by Chinese club Shanghai Shenhua, who moved in with an enormous offer and signed the player. Yet once the season had started that disappointment hardly mattered, for Martino had brought in the less-heralded 23-year-old Miguel Almiron, who quickly turned into a fan favourite, not just in Atlanta but for the whole of MLS.

The Paraguayan midfielder typified Martino's buccaneering attacking style as the team scored 70 goals in the 34-game season – a total that only Toronto, on 74, bettered. Almiron got nine of them; Argentinian team-mates Yamil Asad and Hector Villalba chipped in with seven and 13 respectively, while Venezuelan striker Josef Martinez got 19.

It was the first time that MLS followers had seen Latin-American football at its best – and they loved it. Almiron's jersey became the best seller in the league, while Villalba won the goal of the year award. This was not only winning football, it was also top-class entertainment.

But despite all this, Atlanta did not make it to the Final as they were knocked out by Columbus Crew. Instead, it was Toronto who lifted the MLS Cup.

Having lost last term's showdown on penalties to Seattle Sounders, they came face-to-face once more. The 2016 Final had been a truly awful game, a goalless draw in which Seattle became champions without managing a single shot on goal.

While certainly no classic, the 2017 version was at least just reward for Toronto's loyal supporters who had been suffering year after year of bottom-half finishes in the league.

With US national captain Michael Bradley's leadership, Italy's Sebastian Giovinco as their creative talent and US international Jozy Altidore to score the goals, Toronto were hailed as the best

Close... Toronto's Chris Mavinga (left) puts Seattle under pressure

Success... newcomer Atlanta United

MLS team ever, and lost only five of their regular-season games while collecting a record 69 points.

They triumphed in the Final with goals from Altidore and Victor Vazquez to add the MLS Cup to the Supporters' Shield and Canadian Championship.

In the Eastern Conference Final, Toronto beat Columbus Crew, founder-members of MLS back in 1999 who are now in danger of disappearing. There is talk of moving the club down to Austin, in Texas, and Garber admits it is a possibility, pointing out that in virtually all the areas that matter for the financial success of a major-league sports team Columbus has consistently performed poorly.

"Any move of a sports franchise is traumatic," he admits, "and I feel for the fans in Columbus." But business is business and it seems that the much needed local support for the Crew is lacking. "We've had tremendous public support elsewhere, but I haven't seen that in Columbus," adds Garber.

Youth...a College Cup game between Stanford Cardinal and Indiana Hoosiers (left)

While the fate of the Crew hangs in the balance, MLS prepares to welcome another new team – its 23rd – for the 2018 season: Los Angeles FC, who will be coached by Bob Bradley. A year ago, the league announced that a further two new clubs would be added in 2020, revealing that there were no fewer than 12 cities were hoping to get one of the new franchises.

By December 2017, the dozen had been whittled down to just four, and all sent delegations to make their case in the MLS offices in New York. The four are Cincinnati, Detroit, Nashville and Sacramento – each of which is ready to cough up the initial $150m asking price for an MLS franchise.

Missing from that list was Miami. David Beckham has been trying to start a franchise there for several years, but he has found it extremely difficult to find a location for the downtown stadium that MLS says is necessary. Finding a local owner has also not worked out. But Garber is optimistic, saying "It's the most complicated situation in any market we've experienced. But we want Miami. I'm confident we'll get something done."

The global game was also on Garber's mind as he assessed 2017, and in particular the joint bid made by the USA, Canada and Mexico to stage the 2026 World Cup. "The centre for the drawing up of that bid is located in the MLS offices," pointed out Garber. He also praised the work done by Sunil Gulati who, in the wake of the national team's failure to qualify for the World Cup finals in Russia, has decided not to run for re-election as president of the United Soccer Federation.

There were two topics that Garber did not mention during his address – neither of which were not raised during the subsequent Q&A session with the media: college soccer, and the place of Hispanic players in American soccer.

By not even bothering to comment on college soccer, Garber is revealing the truth. The day before the MLS Cup final, the college Division I semi-finals had been played. Two utterly banal games that brutally exposed just why the college game is rapidly ceasing to be of any interest to the professional game. The training of young players is now happening predominantly at the youth academies that, since 2007, each MLS team has been required to operate.

Leader...Toronto skipper Michael Bradley lifts the championship trophy

As for the Hispanic situation. It is no surprise to find it ignored. But the lack of attention given to it, both by MLS and the amateur youth movements run by the federation, is a major scandal. It is safe to say that neither of those bodies has ever made a move to reach out to Hispanic communities, to understand their strengths and weaknesses, to arrange coaching clinics that would bring Hispanic and non-Hispanic coaches together to build up a mutual understanding between what are really two rather different ways of looking at football, and hence varying ways of playing the sport and of teaching young players.

The result is that the US fails to exploit the growing pool of Hispanic talent born within its borders. The federation is particularly vulnerable on this point. Of the nine men's and boy's national teams detailed on the federation's website (from the senior team down to under-14 boys), only one – the under-20 side - has a Hispanic coach.

As for MLS, it is to be hoped that the sudden and joyful enthusiasm shown throughout MLS at the style of Martino's Atlanta United will prove to be a starting point for MLS teams to broaden their recruiting horizons. WS

SEASON'S BEST

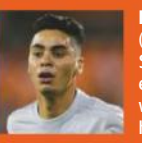
Player Of The Year

DAVID VILLA (New York City)
He turned 36 in December but the Spaniard is still playing with the energy and brio of a teenager, scoring 24 goals throughout the season.

Coach Of The Year

GERARDO MARTINO
(Atlanta United)
The Argentinian, who is known as "Tata", brought the goalscoring excitement of Latin-American *futbol* to MLS.

Newcomer Of The Year



MIGUEL ALMIRON
(Atlanta United)
Skillful, quick and daring, the embodiment of the Latin game, with a smile to let everyone know he's enjoying himself.

Libertadores Cup

TIM VICKERY

Third triumph for Gremio

Brazilians overcome Lanus in the Final

Gremio became the first Brazilian winners of the Libertadores Cup since 2013, beating Lanus of Argentina home and away to record a 3-1 aggregate win.

Lanus, from the southern suburbs of Buenos Aires, style themselves as the biggest neighbourhood club in the world and were making their debut in the Final, while Gremio are a traditional giant who had two previous titles to their credit.

Gremio, from Porto Alegre in the south of Brazil, have a traditional reputation for rugged football. However, the current side are a ball-playing team, built around the talents of support striker Luan, who operates with elegant intelligence in the space between opposing lines, and little midfielder Arthur, who has emerged this year as a prototype Andres Iniesta.

And with 10 wins and just two defeats in their 14-game campaign, Gremio were worthy champions, despite a feeling that they peaked in the middle of the year, before striker Pedro Rocha's sale to Moscow Spartak. His capacity to time his run into the box was a threat in itself, forcing the opposing defence deeper, which in turn opened up more space for Luan. But although Gremio found it hard to replace him, they were back to the best in the first half of the second leg of the Final when they made sure of the trophy by adding two goals to the slender lead they had established in front of their own fans.

Jorge Almiron's Lanus played an attractive 4-3-3, with sweeper-keeper Esteban Andrada allowing the team to move higher up the field and play their patient possession game. The key to the side was their attacking trio of centre-forward Jose Sand supported by wingers Alejandro Silva and Lautaro Acosta.

The team, though, lacked defensive pace, and for away games Silva and Acosta tended to funnel back, forming part of the midfield block, but leaving Sand isolated. As a result, Lanus failed to score away from home in the quarter-finals, semi-finals or Final.

Lanus' task in Porto Alegre was clearly to stay defensively solid, with Silva and Acosta covering the bursts of Gremio's attacking full-backs. And as the Brazilians struggled for rhythm, so Lanus started to pass their way into the game. They advanced as a block and forced keeper Marcelo Grohe into two fine saves – the second, to turn round a Diego Braghieri header from a corner, was especially impressive.

After the break Lanus were unambitious and Gremio ineffective – until the Brazilian side's coach, Renato Portaluppi, made a vital change. The star man in Gremio's first Libertadores triumph in 1983, he launched an aerial assault. On came big centre-forward Jael and versatile midfielder Cicero. Right-back Edilson fired in from deep, Jael won the flick-on and Cicero ghosted behind the line to turn past Andrada.

With a lead to defend in Argentina, Gremio looked extremely comfortable in the opening stages of the second leg, weaving their passing patterns and taking the heat out of the game. The

Hero...Gremio coach Renato Portaluppi

Chip...Luan puts Gremio 3-0 up on aggregate

worrying aspect was that Acosta seemed to have the beating of Edilson – but this was to prove the home side's undoing. Acosta won a free-kick, which Nico Pasquini curled into the Gremio box. The Brazilians cleared and Lanus passed back to their last man, right-back Jose Luis Gomez. However, his poor pass was intercepted by left-winger Fernandinho, who raced away to beat Andrada.

With Lanus now obliged to chase the game, more space opened up for Luan, who moved cleverly across the attacking line. Shortly before half-time he was played in down the left, and after gliding past a succession of defenders he beat the keeper with a calm, subtle little chip to put his side three ahead on aggregate.

Arthur picked up an ankle injury and hobbled off after the interval, and with him went Gremio's fluency. Lanus tried to force the issue but perhaps coach Almiron waited too long to make a change – because the introduction of Marcelino Moreno after 65 minutes made a quick impact. With Moreno cutting in from wide on the left and Acosta closer to Sand, Lanus now had four players across their front line and they had more penetration. And when Acosta was brought down, Sand coolly rolled home the penalty.

Lanus had 20 minutes to find two more goals and force extra-time. After Gremio midfielder Ramiro was sent off, an epic comeback seemed a possibility, but the Argentinians were spent.

The only clear chance in the closing stages fell to Gremio on the counter-attack and they managed to hold on and add the 2017 Libertadores title to their past triumphs of 1983 and 1995.

In the semi-finals, Ignacio Scocco's late goal had given River Plate a 1-0 lead against Lanus after the all-Argentinian first leg. And early in the second leg River looked to have booked their place in the decider, with Scocco blasting home a penalty and right-back Gonzalo Montiel scoring with a header. But with Lanus needing to score four, in the space of a crazy 25 minutes, they got them all.

Sand scored just before and straight after half-time before setting up a third for Acosta, before the vital fourth goal came with the help of the video referee, who identified a tug off the ball by Montiel on Pasquini. After the inevitable delay, Silva stepped up to send keeper German Lux the wrong way from the spot and complete a night that will go down in Libertadores folklore.

Gremio, meanwhile, travelled up to Guayaquil in Ecuador to face Barcelona, who had already got the better of three Brazilian clubs in the campaign. By the 20-minute mark, though, Gremio were two goals ahead, taking full advantage of elementary defensive errors. First Mathias Oyola made a hash of a clearance to let in Luan, and then keeper Maximo Banguera made an awful miscalculation when lining up his wall for a free-kick, leaving Edilson a clear view of the unguarded corner.

Although much of the action took place in and around the Gremio penalty area – where Barcelona badly missed their suspended centre-forward Jonathan Alvez – in a rare moment of attacking fluency, the Brazilians added another goal through Luan for a somewhat flattering 3-0 first-leg margin.

Back for the return, Alvez gave Barcelona the lead in Porto Alegre, but when Damian Diaz scored with a shot that went in off the post, Barcelona's chances of an upset had gone. Their 1-0 win ruined what otherwise was a 100 per home record for Gremio in the campaign, but in the end that was of little concern to the Brazilians. WS

Off...Ramiro is sent off in the second leg

Champions...(left to right) Lucas Barrios, Bruno Cortez and Pedro Geromel

UEFA Club Competitions

GAVIN HAMILTON

Premier League record breakers

But Bundesliga clubs come up short

The German national side may be preparing for the World Cup finals in Russia as one of the favourites, but the country's club football suffered a series of setbacks in the group stage of this season's European competitions.

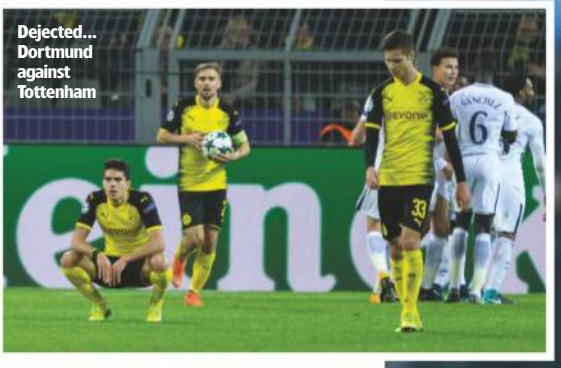
Bayern Munich were the only Bundesliga side to reach the knockout phase of the Champions League, with Borussia Dortmund and RB Leipzig dropping into the Europa League. German teams also fared poorly in the secondary competition, with Cologne, Hertha Berlin and Hoffenheim all failing to make it to the last 32.

In contrast, all five English sides reached the Champions League round of 16 – the first time five teams from one country have reached the knockout stage of the European Cup.

Dortmund were one of the big casualties of the group stage, having been drawn in a tough group with Real Madrid and Tottenham Hotspur, who thrived at their new Wembley base, winning five – including a thrilling 3-1 "home" win over Madrid – and drawing once. Dortmund only picked up points in their two draws with APOEL of Cyprus.

Last season's surprise team Monaco also struggled after the departure of so many key figures from the previous campaign. On paper, a group also containing Porto, Besiktas and RB Leipzig looked promising for Leonardo Jardim's side, but Besiktas proved to be the surprise package, remaining unbeaten as they topped the group. Striker Cenk Tosun and Brazilian midfielder Talisca starred as the Turkish champions won all three of their away games.

The other defeated semi-finalists from last term, Atletico Madrid, fared little better than Monaco. French forward Antoine Griezmann failed to recapture his form of the previous two seasons as his team lost out to Roma and Chelsea, and also failed to beat Qarabag of Azerbaijan at home.



Dejected... Dortmund against Tottenham

In addition to Besiktas, Shakhtar Donetsk defied the odds to reach the knockout stage, despite being forced to play their home games in Lviv – which is 600 miles from their home – due to the ongoing political problems in Ukraine.

Shakhtar beat already-qualified group winners Manchester City in their final match to edge out Napoli, who lost to Feyenoord, courtesy of an injury-time winner from substitute Jeremiah St Juste. Feyenoord's win over Napoli meant the Dutch champions avoided finishing the group stage with no points. Benfica were not so fortunate. The Lisbon side finished pointless, having scored only one goal.

In contrast, Paris Saint-Germain finished as the top scorers in the group stage, with 25 goals, and topped their group ahead of Bayern Munich on goal difference. But PSG's reward for first place is a round-of-16 tie with defending champions Real Madrid, for whom Cristiano Ronaldo became the first player to score in every game of the group stage.

Tottenham were another side who did not benefit from winning their group, having been drawn with Juventus.

For others, there proved to be substantial advantages to winning their group. Roma were paired with Shakhtar after finishing ahead of Chelsea, who must face Barcelona.

Surprise... Besiktas' Ryan Babel takes on Monaco

Dortmund, Atletico and Celtic were some of the big names who dropped into the Europa League, where they joined the likes of Milan, Arsenal, Lazio, Red Star Belgrade and Dynamo Kiev.

Napoli and Leipzig, two of the eight teams that dropped down from the Champions League after the group stage, were drawn together in the round of 32.

Everton's failure to negotiate the group stage of the Europa League was a major factor in the departure of boss Ronald Koeman. The decline of Dutch coaches was mirrrored by the decline of the country's clubs in European competition. Vitesse, the only Dutch representative in

Review

the Europa League group stage after Ajax exited in the qualifying round, finished bottom of their group.

In contrast, Spanish sides look well placed to progress to the latter stages, with Atletico, Athletic Bilbao, Real Socieded and Villarreal still in the draw.

Other notable successes in the Europa League included Astana of Kazakhstan, who were drawn with Portugal's Sporting in their first knockout stage tie, and Sweden's Ostersund, coached by Englishman Graham Potter, who bagged a plum draw with Arsenal.

Former European champions Red Star Belgrade became the first team to reach the knockout stage after starting in the first qualifying round. WS

Plum draw... Ostersund

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ROUND OF 16

FIRST LEGS

February 13
Juventus v Tottenham Hotspur
Basle v Manchester City

February 14
Porto v Liverpool
Real Madrid v Paris Saint-Germain

February 20
Chelsea v Barcelona
Bayern Munich v Besiktas

February 21
Sevilla v Manchester United
Shakhtar Donetsk v Roma

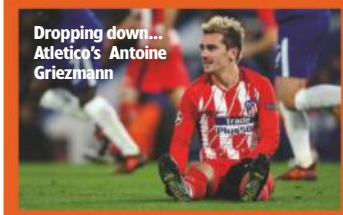
SECOND LEGS

March 6
Liverpool v Porto
Paris Saint-Germain v Real Madrid

March 7
Tottenham Hotspur v Juventus
Manchester City v Basle

March 13
Manchester United v Sevilla
Roma v Shakhtar Donetsk

March 14
Besiktas v Bayern Munich
Barcelona v Chelsea



Dropping down... Atletico's Antoine Griezmann

EUROPA LEAGUE ROUND OF 32

FIRST LEGS

February 13
Red Star Belgrade v CSKA Moscow (5pm)

February 14
Astana v Sporting (4pm)
Marseille v Braga (6pm)
Ludogorets v Milan (6pm)
Ostersund v Arsenal (6pm)
Nice v Lokomotiv Moscow (6pm)
Real Sociedad v Red Bull Salzburg (6pm)
Borussia Dortmund v Atalanta (6pm)
Spartak Moscow v Athletic Bilbao (6pm)
Copenhagen v Atletico Madrid
AEK Athens v Dynamo Kiev
Celtic v Zenit
Napoli v RB Leipzig
Lyon v Villarreal
Partizan Belgrade v Viktoria Plzen
Steaua v Lazio

SECOND LEGS

February 21
CSKA Moscow v Red Star Belgrade (5pm)

February 22
Lokomotiv Moscow v Nice (4pm)
Sporting v Astana (6pm)
Viktoria Plzen v Partizan Belgrade (6pm)
Lazio v Steaua (6pm)
Zenit v Celtic (6pm)
RB Leipzig v Napoli (6pm)
Villarreal v Lyon (6pm)
Atletico Madrid v Copenhagen (6pm)
Dynamo Kiev v AEK Athens
Braga v Marseille
Milan v Ludogorets
Arsenal v Ostersund
Red Bull Salzburg v Real Sociedad
Atalanta v Borussia Dortmund
Athletic Bilbao v Spartak Moscow

November 23-December 10, 2017

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Thursday November 23

ENGLAND: The FA announces a study into links between heading the ball and brain damage will start in January.
FRANCE: Lille appoint a four-man coaching team to take provisional charge after their suspension of Marcelo Bielsa the previous day.
ITALY: Former Brazil international Robinho is sentenced to nine years in prison for sexually assaulting a 22-year-old woman, along with five other men, at a nightclub in 2013, when he played for Milan.

Friday November 24

SINGAPORE: Albirex Niigata win the domestic quadruple for a second year running, adding the Singapore Cup to the Community Shield, League Cup and S.League title with a victory over Global Cebu on penalties in the Final.
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO: North East Stars clinch a first TT Pro League title since 2004 with a 1-0 victory at home to Police.

Saturday November 25

DR CONGO: TP Mazembe retain the CAF Confederation Cup, drawing 0-0 at home to South Africa's Supersport United to win 2-1 on aggregate in the Final.
GERMANY: Four goals down after 25 minutes away to their arch-rivals Borussia Dortmund, Schalke come back to draw 4-4.
JAPAN: A decade after their first success, Urawa Red Diamonds win the AFC Champions League again, beating Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia 2-1 on aggregate in the Final.
SPAIN: Lionel Messi, whose previous deal was due to expire in 2018, signs a new contract with Barcelona that has a buyout clause worth €700m, running until 2021.

Sunday November 26

BELARUS: Losing 3-1 at Gorodeya, Mirko Ivanic equalises in the sixth minute of injury time to earn BATE their 12th Belarusian title in a row.
BRAZIL: Ponte Preta's home game with Vitoria is abandoned with eight minutes remaining as Ponte fans invade the pitch with their side losing 3-2 – a result that sees them relegated from the top flight.
CHINA: Shanghai Shenhua win 3-2 at Shanghai SIPG to overturn a 1-0 deficit from the first leg and win the Chinese FA Cup on away goals.
ENGLAND: Manchester City beat Huddersfield Town 2-1 to set a new English top-flight record of 11 away wins on the trot in all competitions.
FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain extend their Ligue 1 lead to nine points with a 2-0 win at reigning champions Monaco, who slip to third place on goal difference.
GEORGIA: Roin Kvaskhvadze saves Otar Kiteishvili's injury-time penalty as second-place Torpedo Kutaisi beat Dinamo Tbilisi 1-0 to leapfrog their hosts and win the league.
SCOTLAND: Celtic collect a fourth consecutive domestic trophy by beating Motherwell 2-0 in the Scottish League Cup Final.

Coasting...Borussia Dortmund (in yellow) go 4-0 up against Schalke

Monday November 27

ITALY: Milan sack Vincenzo Montella and put youth-team coach Gennaro Gattuso in charge after a goalless draw at home to Torino on Sunday. Giuseppe Iachini replaces Cristian Bucchi at Sassuolo.
NORTHERN IRELAND: Aged just 14 years and 245 days, goalkeeper Conner Byrne made his debut for top-flight side Glenavon as they beat Portadown 2-1 to reach the Mid Ulster Cup Final.
SPAIN: Alaves sack Italian Gianni De Biasi after just two months as coach following four straight defeats in La Liga.

Tuesday November 28

AUSTRALIA: Local reports suggest reigning Scottish champions Celtic have made an approach to buy an ownership stake in A-League side Central Coast Mariners.
SAUDI ARABIA: Juan Antonio Pizzi, who led Chile to the Copa America Centenario in 2016, is appointed coach of Saudi Arabia.

Wednesday November 29

ASIA: Syria's 23-year-old striker Omar Khrbin, who plays for Al Hilal in Saudi Arabia, is named Asia's 2017 Player of the Year.
BRAZIL: Gremio win 2-1 against Lanus in Argentina to claim their first Libertadores Cup for 22 years with a 3-1 aggregate victory.
ENGLAND: West Bromwich Albion make Alan Pardew their sixth

Silverware...Celtic captain Scott Brown holds aloft the Scottish League Cup after his side's 2-1 victory over Motherwell in the Final

permanent manager since 2011.
FRANCE: Metz become the first side in history to lose eight straight home games in Ligue 1 as they go down 3-0 to Marseille.
SPAIN: Trailing 3-0 on aggregate to Real Sociedad with 45 minutes left, third-tier Lleida Esportiu draw 3-3 and win on away goals in the Spanish Cup. Another third-tier side Formentera beat Athletic Bilbao with a 96th-minute winner.
VENEZUELA: Mineros beat Zamora 4-3 at home to win the Venezuela Cup 5-4 on aggregate.

Thursday November 30

CHINA: Andre Villas-Boas quits as coach of Shanghai SIPG, saying he will take a break from football to drive in the Dakar Rally in January.
ENGLAND: Everton appoint Sam Allardyce as manager on an 18-month contract.

Friday December 1

CHINA: Shandong Luneng decide ➤

Giant-killers...Formentera (in blue)

Central African Republic

STEVE MENARY

Savoy dreaming of finals qualification

National coach believes home success will suffice

After the social unrest that claimed more than 5,000 lives in 2014 alone, football is once again edging towards normality in the Central African Republic, even though problems still remain.

As infighting gripped the country, a domestic league that began in 1968 was abandoned in 2014 and 2015. But, with tentative peace restored, the game has returned, although only clubs from the capital, Bangui, are able to play in the league due to what national coach Raoul Savoy describes as "conflicts and insecurity in the provinces".

Swiss-born Savoy, who has also coached the national sides of Ethiopia, Swaziland and Gambia, is now in his second spell with CAR. "I fell in love with this country and its people," he says. "After a short break in The Gambia, I came back to my first love.

"Compared to my other experiences, here there is everything to do. It is the wish of each coach to be able to build from the base; to put his paw and build brick by brick."

The CAR gained independence from France in 1960 but did not enter international competitions until the 1970s. Even then, withdrawals and disqualifications were commonplace.

However, after beating Rwanda 2-1 at home in June's opening qualifier, Savoy believes qualification for the 2019 African Nations Cup is possible if CAR win all their home games, even though that will mean beating Guinea and Ivory Coast. He says: "With the new competition with 24 nations we have the opportunity to qualify. We have started the qualifiers well and we must stay on this dynamic."

The domestic league is as yet unable to offer Savoy much help. Olympic Real de Bangui have won the last two titles but no club from CAR has appeared in the CAF Champions League since they lost 5-1 to Nigeria's Kano Pillars in 2013.

> "I fell in love with this country and its people. After a short break in The Gambia, I came back to my first love"
> Raoul Savoy, CAR national coach

"The local teams don't have the budget to travel and compete at the continental level," says Savoy, who acknowledges that finance is the biggest obstacle to development. "The country has many other priorities and needs to focus on rebuilding.

"We are aware of its issues. That's why we try to juggle the means that we have." WS

Hopeful...the national side

➤ against offering German coach Felix Magath a new contract and replace him with former player and vice general manager Li Xiaopeng.
ITALY: Gonzalo Higuain scores away to his former club as Juventus end Napoli's unbeaten start to Serie A with a 1-0 win.
WORLD CUP: The draw for next summer's finals puts Portugal and Spain together in Group B, while hosts Russia will face Saudi Arabia in the tournament opener.

Saturday December 2

ENGLAND: Manchester United win 3-1 at Arsenal, despite having Paul Pogba sent off, and end the hosts' run of 12 successive home wins.
FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain lose 2-1 at Strasbourg, their first defeat in 26 matches in all competitions.
NICARAGUA: Walter Ferretti are held 0-0 by Managua in the Apertura Final but win on away goals, having drawn 1-1 a week ago.
PANAMA: Chorrillo beat Arabe Unido 5-1 in the Apertura Final.
ZAMBIA: ZESCO United beat Mufulira Wanderers 4-2 on the last day of the season to win the league, finishing a point ahead of Zanaco.

Sunday December 3

BRAZIL: A year on from losing most of their squad in a plane crash, Chapecoense earn a place in the Libertadores Cup qualifying rounds as Tulio de Melo scores in the fifth minute of injury time to snatch a 2-1 win over Coritiba.
GERMANY: After no wins from the first 14 league games, Cologne part company with coach Peter Stoger.
ITALY: After a record-breaking run of 14 straight defeats, Benevento claim a first-ever point in Serie A as keeper Alberto Brignoli scores an injury-time equaliser in a 2-2 draw with Milan. Internazionale go top for the first time in nearly two years with a 5-0 victory over Chievo.
KENYA: The CECAFA Cup gets under way with host nation Kenya beating Rwanda 2-0.
NORWAY: Lillestrom beat Sarpsborg 3-2 to win the Norwegian Cup.
PERU: Alianza Lima's 2-0 victory over Comerciantes Unidos sees them crowned clausura champions.
VENEZUELA: Mineros beat Deportivo Lara 1-0 in the first leg of the Clausura Final with a goal from Nelson Hernandez.

Monday December 4

ENGLAND: The draw for the third round of the FA Cup, to be played over the weekend of January 5-8, gives Liverpool a home tie with ➤

Asia

JOHN DUERDEN

Urawa Reds crowned champions

Japanese take title once more

It has been said that Japanese teams, due to the strength of the J.League, may choose to prioritise domestic football over continental competition. But while this is often used as an excuse for poor performances in the AFC Champions League, there were no such arguments this year as Urawa Red Diamonds became the country's first Asian champions since 2008.

And Urawa are now the only Japanese side to have won the tournament twice, following a 3-1 aggregate victory over Sepahan of Iran in the 2007 Final.

Yuke Abe played in that victorious side a decade ago and was captain this time around as Reds saw off Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal 2-1 over the two legs.

The Saudi hosts were clearly on top in the opening game in Riyadh but found visiting keeper Shusaku Nishikawa hard to beat.

After taking an early lead through Brazilian striker Rafael Silva, Urawa defended stoutly to deny a stellar opposition attack that was led by Omar Khribin. In excellent form for club and country throughout the year, Khribin – who would later be voted Asian Player of the Year – almost took Syria to the 2018 World Cup with his prowess in front of goal but he missed a number of clear-cut chances in front of just under

Victorious...Reds skipper Yuke Abe lifts the trophy

Decisive...Rafael Silva scores Urawa's winning goal in the return leg on home soil in Saitama

60,000 fans at the King Fahd International Stadium. Khribin did manage to conjure up an equaliser – which made him the tournament's top scorer with 10 goals – but the Japanese returned home with the advantage of an away goal and a sense of expectancy for the second leg in Saitama.

Urawa had won all six earlier home games, and so it proved again, with Silva scoring the winning goal two minutes from time, after Al Hilal's Salem Al Dawsari had been shown a second yellow card.

"The players had a special motivation for this tournament as did the supporters, so I think this is why we were able to do so well," said Urawa coach Takafumi Hori. He had replaced Mihailo Petrovic in July and he paid tribute to his predecessor, saying the Serb had "built the foundations of the team and I learned from him".

Petrovic had led the side to the top of their group, with 18 goals in six games against decent opposition in Shanghai SIPG, Seoul and Western Sydney. But after they only just squeezed past Jeju United of South Korea in the round of 16, Hori came in and brought about a change in playing style. With a rigid 4-1-4-1 set-up, his side beat fellow Japanese side Kawasaki Frontale to set-up another meeting in the semi-finals with Shanghai SIPG and their star roster of Hulk, Oscar and leading Chinese goalscorer Wu Lei.

Hulk gave the Chinese an early lead in the first leg before Yosuke Kashiwagi, who would go on to be named the tournament's MVP, equalised, with Silva scoring early in the return for a 2-1 victory.

For Al Hilal, this was a second Final defeat in three years, having lost to Western Sydney Wanderers in 2014, and many of their players removed their runners-up medals as soon as they received them.

Sadly, Urawa only finished seventh in the J.League and did not qualify for the 2018 tournament so they will not be able to defend their trophy. WS

➤ Merseyside neighbours Everton.
SPAIN: Trailing 2-0 with 20 minutes left in Abelardo Fernandez's first game in charge of Alaves, a hat-trick from Ibai Gomez secures a 3-2 win at Girona and lifts the team off the bottom of the table.

Tuesday December 5

ENGLAND: Two goals in three minutes see Manchester United come from behind to beat CSKA Moscow 2-1 and top their Champions League group.
ITALY: Roma receive the green light to build their own stadium, which they hope to occupy by the start of the 2020-21 season. The decision comes after they beat Qarabag of Azerbaijan 1-0 to reach the Champions League knockout stage, along with Juventus who win 2-0 in Greece against Olympiakos.
SWITZERLAND: Basle beat Benfica 2-0 in Portugal to reach the Champions League round of 16.

Wednesday December 6

ARGENTINA: Independiente beat Flamengo of Brazil 2-1 in the home leg of the Sudamericana Cup Final.
ENGLAND: Liverpool beat Spartak Moscow 7-0 to become the fifth English team in the knockout stage of this season's Champions League.
GERMANY: Bottom-of-the-league Cologne appoint Armin Veh as their managing director.
ITALY: Davide Nicola resigns as coach of Crotone after four defeats in a row in all competitions.
KUWAIT: FIFA lifts the suspension that was imposed on the Kuwait FA in October 2015.
UAE: Al Jazira beat Auckland City 1-0 in the opening game of the Club World Cup.
UKRAINE: Shakhtar Donetsk win 2-1 to end Manchester City's 100 per cent record in this season's Champions League group stage and confirm a place in the last 16, along with Porto and Sevilla.

Thursday December 7

BALLON D'OR: Cristiano Ronaldo wins the award for a fifth time – and for the second year in a row – to equal Lionel Messi's record.
EUROPA LEAGUE: AEK Athens, Astana, Athletic Bilbao, Red Star Belgrade, Copenhagen, Lokomotiv Moscow, Ludogorets and Marseille book their place in the last 32.
GERMANY: Jonathan Klinsmann, the son of Jurgen Klinsmann, saves a penalty on his debut for Hertha Berlin as they draw 1-1 at home to Ostersund in the Europa League.
PERU: National-team skipper ➤

➤ Paolo Guerrero is suspended for a year after testing positive for cocaine following October's World Cup qualifier against Argentina.

Friday December 8

ITALY: Crotone appoint Walter Zenga as their coach, with Benito Carbone coming in as his assistant.
HOLLAND: For the first time, the Dutch champions will not get an automatic place in the Champions League group stage next season.

Saturday December 9

CHILE: Colo-Colo make sure of their 32nd league title with a 3-0 win away to Huachipato.
ITALY: Internazionale stay top of Serie A with a 0-0 draw at third-placed Juventus.
MALAWI: Kamuzu Barracks win the Malawian Cup for the first time, beating fellow army side Moyale Barracks 1-0 in the Final.
USA: Toronto beat Seattle Sounders 2-0 to win the MLS Cup.

Clash...Juventus' Giorgio Chiellini (right) challenges Milan Skriniar of Internazionale

Sunday December 10

BOLIVIA: A 1-1 draw at Nacional Potosi is enough to give Bolivar the Clausura title with a week to spare.
ENGLAND: Manchester City equal the English top-flight record of 14

Japan

MIKE PLASTOW

Kawasaki end their drought

"Silver collectors" strike gold at last

Not only did the 2017 J.League season go to the final day, it also produced a first-time champion who hadn't been top of the table all term. That club was Kawasaki Frontale, one of the giants of Japanese football during the past decade whose imposing form has, until now, been matched only by their astonishing dearth of trophies.

This time, Kawasaki got it right and gave their long-suffering fans the best possible finish to what had begun to look like another terribly disappointing campaign. But then they produced a 15-game unbeaten run, from July to the last round of matches, and managed to leapfrog Kashima Antlers at the last moment with a 5-0 win over Omiya Ardija. A hat-trick from Kawasaki captain Yu Kobayashi also took him to the top of the scoring charts with 23 goals, one ahead of Cerezo Osaka's Kenyu Sugimoto.

Defending champions Kashima appeared to have everything sewn up and needed just one win from their last two matches to clinch what would have been their ninth league title. Instead, two draws let Kawasaki slip in front and shed their image of being eternal bridesmaids, or "silver collectors" as coach Toru Oniki put it. That collection includes three or four second-place finishes in the J.League depending on how you count it – last year they were second on points but officially finished third after slipping down to third place in the play-offs – and now four runners-up spots in the League Cup, too, having lost 2-0 in the Final to Cerezo Osaka. That and a morale-destroying 5-4 aggregate loss against Urawa Red Diamonds in the AFC Champions League quarter-finals, after winning the first leg 3-1, made it look as if Frontale might end the season empty-handed again.

Those losses hurt but they were also quickly cited by Oniki as key turning points in the season. "It was a question of smiling through whatever happened," he said, "and where there are smiles, there's vitality. The hand on Kawasaki's clock has moved on."

Disappointed with their finish, Kashima's title defence didn't get off to the happiest of starts either, and they dismissed championship-winning coach Masatada Ishii after a Champions League defeat to Guangzhou Evergrande. That surprising move seemed to have worked as replacement Go Oiwa's micro-management closed the cracks and Kashima led from the front from early August until the final day.

The 2017 campaign was a season of sharp contrasts for Urawa Reds, too, who started strongly in the spring, only to drop out of the J. League title race entirely with a disastrous loss of form in the summer. Long-serving boss Mihailo Petrovic was replaced by Takafumi Hori, whose counter-attacking approach was unable to rescue the team's domestic form but did bring success in the Champions League.

Cerezo Osaka also had a memorable season under Korean manager Yoon Jong-hwan after promotion and even led the table at the turnaround. They went on to defeat Kawasaki in the League Cup

Champion...Kengo Nakamura of Kawasaki Frontale

Over...Kashima Antlers players are dejected at missing out

successive league wins with a 2-1 victory at Manchester United and in doing so they end their hosts' club record run of 41 successive home games unbeaten in all competitions.
GERMANY: Borussia Dortmund sack Peter Bosz after seven months in charge and appoint former Cologne boss Peter Stoger until the end of the season.
HOLLAND: PSV's lead at the top of the Eredivisie is cut to five points as they lose 3-0 at Ajax.
MEXICO: Drawing 1-1 after the first leg, Tigres surrender an early goal away to Monterrey but manage to win 3-2 on aggregate in the Liga MX Apertura Final.
PARAGUAY: Losing 2-1 at half-time, Cerro Porteno come back to beat Sol de America 3-2 and claim the league title.
SPAIN: Lionel Messi equals Gerd Muller's 525 goals for a single club in one of Europe's top five leagues as Barcelona beat Villarreal 2-0. Atletico Madrid beat Real Betis 1-0 for a club-record 19th consecutive unbeaten La Liga game.
URUGUAY: Penarol beat Defensor on penalties in the play-offs and are crowned national champions as they also had the best record in the aggregate table. WS

Champions...Cerro Porteno's Diego Churin gets ready to celebrate with team-mates

> "It was a question of smiling through whatever happened, and where there are smiles, there's vitality"
> J.League-winning coach Toru Oniki

Final and qualified for a play-off position in the 2018 Champions League via their third-place finish.

Cerezo's near neighbours, Vissel Kobe, made headlines in the summer by signing Lukas Podolski and he began brightly, scoring twice on his debut before his tally stopped at five in 15 games and Kobe remained firmly entrenched in mid-table.

So too were the usually high-flying Gamba Osaka. The proof that they are still doing a lot of things right was reflected in the selection of six Gamba players for Japan's East Asian Cup campaign in December, but coach Kenta Hasegawa stepped down at the end of the season after five years in charge.

Hajime Moriyasu – who led Sanfrecce Hiroshima to three J.League titles in four years, from 2012 to 2015 – quit in June with the team second from bottom and now leads Japan's Olympic side. Having lost strikers Hisato Sato, Takuma Asano and Peter Utaka, as well as Moriyasu, Hiroshima continued to battle under Swedish boss Jan Jonsson and finished a point clear of Ventforet Kofu, who were relegated with Albirex Niigata and Omiya Ardija.

Shonan Bellmare bounced straight back into the top flight as J2 champions and Cho Kwi-jea will start the 2018 season as the J.League's longest-serving coach ever with a seventh year in the job.

Going up for the first time in their history are V-Varen Nagasaki, and they are joined by play-off winners Nagoya Grampus. WS

SEASON'S BEST

Player of the Year

YU KOBAYASHI
(Kawasaki Frontale)
Took over the captaincy from last year's J.League Player of the Year, Kengo Nakamura, and led his club to its first title. Also finished the season as the competition's top goalscorer.

Coach of the Year

TORU ONIKI
(Kawasaki Frontale)
Spoke about turning Frontale into a team that was hard to beat and did so in style, with only four league losses all season and none after July. His side also gave up none of their attacking flair.

Newcomer of the Year

YUTA NAKAYAMA
(Kashiwa Reysol)
The 20-year old centre-back missed just four league games and was a tall, dependable presence. He also played every Japan game at the 2017 Under-20 World Cup.

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

NOVEMBER 2017

HOW IT WORKS Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Barcelona)	14
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	9
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	5
EDERSON (Manchester City)	4
Samir HANDANOVIC (Internazionale)	2
Alphonse AREOLA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Thibaut COURTOIS (Chelsea)	1
NETO (Valencia)	1
Sven ULREICH (Bayern Munich)	1

DEFENDERS

Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	11
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	10
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	9
Dani ALVES (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	8
Milan SKRINIAR (Internazionale)	8
Kyle WALKER (Manchester City)	8
Kalidou KOULIBALY (Napoli)	7
John STONES (Manchester City)	7
Faouzi GHOULAM (Napoli)	6
Samuel UMTITI (Barcelona)	6
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Aleksandar KOLAROV (Roma)	4
Layvin KURZAWA (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Antonio VALENCIA (Manchester United)	3
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	2
Marc BARTRA (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Andreas CHRISTENSEN (Chelsea)	2
Jose GAYA (Valencia)	2
Diego GODIN (Atletico Madrid)	2
Andreas GRANQVIST (Krasnodar)	2
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	2
Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	2
Nelson SEMEDO (Barcelona)	2
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	1
Ben DAVIES (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Stefan DE VRIJ (Lazio)	1
Mats HUMMELS (Bayern Munich)	1
Phil JONES (Manchester United)	1
Sead KOLASINAC (Arsenal)	1
MARCELO (Lyon)	1
Jeremy MATHIEU (Sporting)	1
NALDO (Schalke)	1
Lukasz PISZCZEK (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Salif SANE (Hanover)	1
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Jonathan TAH (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Raphael VARANE (Real Madrid)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	30
Christian ERIKSEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	6
Leroy SANE (Manchester City)	6
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	5
Goncalo GUEDES (Valencia)	5
ISCO (Real Madrid)	4
JORGINHO (Napoli)	3
Adrien RABIOT (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Nuri SAHIN (Borussia Dortmund)	3
David SILVA (Manchester City)	3
Marek HAMSIK (Napoli)	2
Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	2
Andres INIESTA (Barcelona)	2
Geoffrey KONDOGBIA (Valencia)	2
Nemanja MATIC (Manchester United)	2
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	2
Dani PAREJO (Valencia)	2
CASEMIRO (Real Madrid)	1
Emre CAN (Liverpool)	1
DANILO (Porto)	1
Marouane FELLAINI (Manchester United)	1
Alejandro GOMEZ (Atalanta)	1
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	1
Naby KEITA (RB Leipzig)	1
Sami KHEDIRA (Juventus)	1
Yunus MALLI (Wolfsburg)	1
Mesut OZIL (Arsenal)	1
Andreas PEREIRA (Valencia)	1
Ivan PERISIC (Internazionale)	1
Maximilian PHILIPP (Borussia Dortmund)	1
PORTU (Girona)	1
Christian PULISIC (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	1
Florian THAUVIN (Marseille)	1
Marco VERRATTI (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Arturo VIDAL (Bayern Munich)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	23
Edinson CAVANI (Paris Saint-Germain)	14
NEYMAR (Paris Saint-Germain)	14
Mohamed SALAH (Liverpool)	10
Paulo DYBALA (Juventus)	9
Ciro IMMOBILE (Lazio)	9
Harry KANE (Tottenham Hotspur)	9
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	8
Romelu LUKAKU (Manchester United)	8
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	4
Timo WERNER (RB Leipzig)	4
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	3
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	2
Radamel FALCAO (Monaco)	2
Nabil FEKIR (Lyon)	2
Lorenzo INSIGNE (Napoli)	2
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Cedric BAKUMBU (Villarreal)	1
Memphis DEPAY (Lyon)	1
Gabriel JESUS (Manchester City)	1
Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	1
Kylian MBAPPE (Paris Saint-Germain)	1

Internationals

EAST ASIAN CUP FINALS

Played in Japan

Dec 9 - Tokyo
South Korea 2 (Kim Shin-wook 12, Lee Jae-sung 19)
China 2 (Wei Shihao 9, Yu Dabao 76)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 9,103. **Ref:** Al Marri (Qat)
S Korea: Kim Jin-hyeon - Choi Chul-soon (Go Yo-han 59), Jang Hyun-soo, Kwon Kyung-won, Kim Jin-su, Ju Se-jong, Jung Woo-young, Lee Jae-sung, Lee Myung-joo (Lee Chang-min 80), Yeom Ki-hun, Kim Shin-wook.
China: Yan Junling - Deng Hanwen, Gao Zhunyi, Liu Yiming, Zheng Zheng, He Chao, Zhao Xuri, Wu Xi (Yin Hongbo 73), Yang Liyu (Xiao Zhi 65), Yu Dabao, Wei Shihao (Li Xuepeng 46).

Dec 9 - Tokyo
Japan 1 (Ideguchi 90+3)
North Korea 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 20,806. **Ref:** Beath (Aus)
Japan: Nakamura - Muroya, Taniguchi, Shoji, Kurumaya, Ideguchi, Konno, Kobayashi, Takahagi (Ito 56), Kurata (Abe 81), Kanazaki (Kawamata 71).
N Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Sim Hyon-jin, Jang Kuk-chol, Ri Yong-chol, Kang Kuk-chol/D, Ri Yong-jik, Ri Un-chol, Pak Myong-song (An Byong-jun 77), Pak Song-chol (Kang Kuk-chol/M 85), Jong Il-gwan (Jang Ok-chol 90+2), Kim Yu-song.

Dec12 - Tokyo
North Korea 0
South Korea 1 (Ri Yong-chol og 64)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 5,477. **Ref:** Perera (Sri)
N Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Sim Hyon-jin, Jang Kuk-chol, Ri Yong-chol, Kang Kuk-chol/D, Pak Myong-song (An Byong-jun 73), Pak Song-chol (Kang Kuk-chol/M 68), Ri Yong-jik, Ri Un-chol (Jang Ok-chol 89), Jong Il-gwan, Kim Yu-song.
S Korea: Cho Hyun-woo - Go Yo-han, Jung Seung-hyun, Kwon Kyung-won, Kim Jin-su, Jung Woo-young, Jang Hyun-soo, Lee Chang-min (Lee Myung-joo 65), Lee Jae-sung, Jin Seong-wook (Kim Shin-wook 65), Kim Min-woo.

Dec12 - Tokyo
Japan 2 (Kobayashi 84, Shoji 88)
China 1 (Yu Dabao pen 90+3)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 17,220. **Ref:** Bin Jahari (Sin)
Japan: Higashiguchi - Ueda, Miura, Shoji, Yamamoto, Konno, Ito (Kawamata 75), Oshima (Ideguchi 30), Kurata, Doi (Abe 82), Kobayashi.
China: Wang Dalei - Fu Huan, Liu Yiming, Gao Zhunyi (He Guan 46), Zheng Zheng, Li Xuepeng, Wei Shihao (Yang Liyu 83), He Chao, Zhao Yuhao, Yu Dabao, Xiao Zhi (Zhang Wenzhao 46).

Dec16 - Tokyo
China 1 (Wei Shihao 28)
North Korea 1 (Jong Il-gwan 81)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 18,272. **Ref:** Kovalenko (Uzb)
China: Wang Dalei - Deng Hanwen, Liu Yiming, He Guan, Zheng Zheng, Fu Huan (Wu Xi 24), Zhang Wenzhao (Fan Xiaodong 62), Zhao Xuri, Zhao Yuhao, Yu Dabao (Yang Liyu 79), Wei Shihao.
N Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Pak Myong-song, Jang Kuk-chol, Ri Yong-chol, Kang Kuk-chol/D, Ri Yong-jik (Jang Ok-chol 67), Ri Un-chol, Sim Hyon-jin, An Byong-jun (Pak Song-chol 89), Kang Kuk-chol/M (Yun Il-gwang 56), Jong Il-gwan.

Dec16 - Tokyo
Japan 1 (Kobayashi pen 3)
South Korea 4 (Kim Shin-wook 13, 35, Jung Woo-young 23, Yeom Ki-hun 69)
HT: 1-3. **Att:** 36,645. **Ref:** Beath (Aus)
Japan: Nakamura - Ueda, Miura, Shoji, Kurumaya, Ideguchi (Misao 66), Konno, Ito (Kawamata 70), Kurata (Abe 81), Doi, Kobayashi.
S Korea: Cho Hyun-woo - Go Yo-han, Jang Hyun-soo, Yun Young-sun, Kim Jin-su, Lee Jae-sung (Jung Seung-hyun 72), Ju Se-jong, Jung Woo-young, Kim Min-woo, Lee Keun-ho (Yeom Ki-hun 68), Kim Shin-wook (Jin Seong-wook 88).

EAST ASIAN CUP FINALS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea (C)	3	2	1	0	7	3	7
Japan	3	2	0	1	4	5	6
China	3	0	2	1	4	5	2
North Korea	3	0	1	2	1	3	1

CECAFA CUP

Played in Kenya

Group A

Dec 3 - Kakamega
Kenya 2 (Juma pen 25, Otieno 42)
Rwanda 0
Sent off: Kayumba (Rwanda) 55

Dec 3 - Machakos
Libya 0
Tanzania 0

Dec 5 - Machakos
Zanzibar 3 (Yahya 35, Issa 53, Khamis 87)
Rwanda 1 (Hakizimana 47)

Kenya 0
Libya 0

Dec 7 - Machakos
Tanzania 1 (Mao 29)
Zanzibar 2 (Khamis 68, Hamad 79)

Rwanda 0
Libya 0

Dec 9 - Machakos
Rwanda 2 (Nshuti 18, Biramahire 65)
Tanzania 1 (Lyanga 30)

Kenya 0
Zanzibar 0

Dec11 - Machakos
Libya 1 (Al Harish 24)
Zanzibar 0

Kenya 1 (Oburu 20)
Tanzania 0

CECAFA CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kenya (Q)	4	2	2	0	3	0	8
Zanzibar (Q)	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Libya	4	1	3	0	1	0	6
Rwanda	4	1	1	2	3	6	4
Tanzania	4	0	1	3	2	5	1

Group B

Dec 4 - Kakamega
Uganda 0
Burundi 0

Dec 5 - Kakamega
Ethiopia 3 (Yalew 25, 51, Sani 58)
South Sudan 0

Dec 7 - Kakamega
Burundi 4 (Kwizera 30, Urasenga 55, Mavugo pen 69, Nahimana 79)
Ethiopia 1 (Hotessa pen 45+1)

Dec 8 - Kakamega
Uganda 5 (Karisa 7, Kaweesa 10, Nsibambi 30, 57, Wadada 85)
South Sudan 1 (Luak Wol 26)

Dec10 - Kakamega
Ethiopia 1 (Sani 24)
Uganda 1 (Nsibambi 86)
Sent off: Muleme 82, Awany 90+2 (both Uganda)

Dec11 - Kakamega
South Sudan 0
Burundi 0

CECAFA CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uganda (Q)	3	1	2	0	6	2	5
Burundi (Q)	3	1	2	0	4	1	5
Ethiopia	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
South Sudan	3	0	1	2	1	8	1

● *Top 2 in both groups qualified for semi-finals*

Semi-finals

Dec14 - Kisumu
Kenya 1 (Isuza 97)
Burundi 0

Dec15 - Kisumu
Uganda 1 (Nsibambi 29)
Zanzibar 2 (Makame 23, Issa pen 58)
Sent off: Nsubuga (Uganda) 57

3rd-place match

Dec17 - Machakos
Burundi 1 (Kwizera 23)
Uganda 2 (Juma 49, 75)

Final

Dec17 - Machakos
Kenya 2 (O Ochieng 5, Juma 97)
Zanzibar 2 (Khamis 88, 99)
Aet. **HT:** 1-0. **90mins:** 1-1
Kenya 3-2 on pens

PACIFIC MINI GAMES TOURNAMENT

Played in Port Vila, Vanuatu

Dec 2
Fiji 8 (Wasasala 2, 16, 65, 67, Waqa 24, 48, 56, Matarerega 41)
Tuvalu 0
HT: 4-0. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Time (Sol)

Tonga 0
Solomon Islands 8 (Donga 4, Totori 15, 19, Feni 77, 87, Mara 71, 88, Tanito 82)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Hopken (Van)

New Caledonia U21 1 (S Welepane 51)
Vanuatu 2 (Saniel 33, Soromon 90+2)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 5,000. **Ref:** Chand (Fij)
Sent off: Bernole (New Caledonia) 60

Dec 5
Tuvalu 2 (Ionatana 15, Petoa 69)
New Caledonia U21 1 (S Welepane 76)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Banga (Van)

Dec 6
Solomon Islands 0
Fiji 0
Att: 4,000. **Ref:** Hopken (Van)

Vanuatu 5 (Ruben 12, Soromon 38, 67, Kaltack 73, 90)
Tonga 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 6,000. **Ref:** Yareboinen (PNG)

Dec 9
Tonga 2 (Feao 35, Uele 66)
New Caledonia U21 4 (Gope-Iwate 1, 90, Luepak 47, Waitreu 57)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 2,000. **Ref:** Time (Sol)

Vanuatu 1 (Soromon 72)
Fiji 1 (Wasasala 30)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 7,000. **Ref:** Yareboinen (PNG)

Solomon Islands 6 (Fa'arodo 5, Mara 14, 81, Bule 44, Feni 65, Totori 90)
Tuvalu 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 1,500. **Ref:** Banga (Van)

Dec12
Fiji 4 (Waqa 7, 84, Qasevakatini pen 14, Radrigai 17)
Tonga 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Yareboinen (PNG)
Sent off: Feao (Tonga) 90

Tuvalu 0
Vanuatu 10 (Tangis 8, 31, 57, 90, Molivakarua 60, Soromon 68, 80, Kaltack 76, 78, 90+2)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 4,000. **Ref:** Sogo (Sol)

New Caledonia U21 0
Solomon Islands 1 (Kaua 21)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 2,500. **Ref:** Hopken (Van)

Dec15
Tuvalu 4 (Uaelesi 46, Fahina og 49, Petoa 90, Lotonu 90+2)
Tonga 3 (Polovili 19, Tokotaha 29, 49)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Sogo (Sol)

Fiji 4 (Waqa 44, 46, Tuivuna 90, Matarerega 90+1)
New Caledonia U21 1 (S Welepane 81)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 1,500. **Ref:** Hopken (Van)
Sent off: Tuilau (Fiji) 60

Dec15
Solomon Islands 2 (Totori 27, Fa'arodo 45)
Vanuatu 3 (Tangis 25, Molivakarua 41, Kalo 67)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 6,000. **Ref:** Yareboinen (PNG)

PACIFIC MINI GAMES TOURNAMENT – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vanuatu (C)	5	4	1	0	21	4	13
Fiji	5	3	2	0	17	2	11
Solomon Is	5	3	1	1	17	3	10
Tuvalu	5	2	0	3	6	28	6
N Caledonia U21	5	1	0	4	7	11	3
Tonga	5	0	0	5	5	25	0

CTFA INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENT

(Chinese Taipei Football Association)
Played in Taipei, Taiwan

Dec1
Philippines 3 (P Younghusband 35, Guirado 46, Miyagi 81)
Laos 1 (Chanthasili 90+2)

Dec 3
East Timor 1 (Henrique Cruz 84)
Laos 2 (Nonmany pen 3, Natphasouk 41)
Sent off: Ady Trindade 72, Filipe Oliveira 82 (both East Timor)

Taiwan 3 (Li Mao 38, 63, Chen Ting-yang 81)
Philippines 0
Sent off: Guirado (Philippines) 67

Dec 4
Taiwan 3 (Wen Chih-hao 20, Chen Ting-yang 63, Chen Po-liang 77)
East Timor 1 (Rufino Gama 58)

Dec 5
Philippines 0
East Timor 1 (Silveiro Garcia 90)

Taiwan 2 (Li Mao 9, 12)
Laos 0

CTFA INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENT – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Taiwan (C)	3	3	0	0	8	1	9
East Timor	3	1	0	2	3	5	3
Philippines	3	1	0	2	3	5	3
Laos	3	1	0	2	3	6	3

ACEH WORLD SOLIDARITY CUP

Played in Banda Aceh, Indonesia

Dec 2
Kyrgyzstan 3 (Zemlianukhin 14, 65, Saarbekov 56)
Mongolia 0

Indonesia 4 (Hansamu 18, Septian 25, Fachrudin 69, Yabes 89)
Brunei 0

Dec 4
Brunei 0
Kyrgyzstan 4 (Zemlianukhin 1, Baimatov 22, pen 55, Saarbekov 60)

Indonesia 3 (Gavin 7, Haay 25, Spasojevic pen 45+2)
Mongolia 2 (Tuguldur pen 37, pen 56)

Dec 6
Indonesia 0
Kyrgyzstan 1 (Sagynbaev 19)

ACEH WORLD SOLIDARITY CUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kyrgyzstan (C)	3	3	0	0	8	0	9
Indonesia	3	2	0	1	7	3	6
Mongolia[1]	2	0	0	2	2	6	0
Brunei[1]	2	0	0	2	0	8	0

[1] *Mongolia v Brunei, scheduled for Dec 6, was cancelled because of the poor pitch condition*

FRIENDLIES

Sunday, November 19

Nov19 - Suva
Fiji 0
Estonia 2 (Henri Anier 14, Miller 90+2)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 4,500. **Ref:** Waldron (NZ)

Thursday, November 23

Nov 23 - Port Vila
Vanuatu 0
Estonia 1 (Liivak 29)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Lacour (NwC)

Saturday, November 25

Nov 25 - Bekasi
Indonesia 2 (Spasojevic pen 37, 75)
Guyana 1 (Agard 9)

Sunday, November 26

Nov 26 - Noumea
New Caledonia 1 (Ounei 64)
Estonia 1 (Henri Anier 54)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,109. **Ref:** Zitouni (Tah)

Saturday, December 2

Dec 2 - Basseterre
St Kitts & Nevis 1 (Martin 60)
Grenada 0

Club football

WORLD

CLUB WORLD CUP

Played in United Arab Emirates

1st round

Dec 6 - Al Ain
Al Jazira (UAE) 1 (Romarinho 37)
Auckland City (NZ) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 4,246. **Ref:** Diedhiou (Sen)

2nd round

Dec 9 - Abu Dhabi
Pachuca (Mex) 1 (Guzman 111)
Wydad Casablanca (Mor) 0
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 0-0. **Att:** 12,488.
Ref: Irmatov (Uzb)
Sent off: Nekkach (Wydad) 68

Dec 9 - Abu Dhabi
Al Jazira 1 (Mabkhout 51)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Jap) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,593. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)

● *Pachuca & AlJazira qualified for the semi-finals, which Gremio & Real Madrid entered directly; Wydad Casablanca & Urawa Red Diamonds went into the 5th-place match*

5th-place match

Dec12 - Al Ain
Wydad Casablanca 2 (El Haddad 21, Hajhouj pen 90+4)
Urawa Red Diamonds 3 (Mauricio 18, 60, Kashiwagi 26)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 4,281. **Ref:** Conger (NZ)

Semi-finals

Dec12 - Al Ain
Gremio (Bra) 1 (Everton 95)
Pachuca 0
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 0-0. **Att:** 6,428.
Ref: Brych (Ger)
Gremio: Marcelo Grohe - Edilson (Leo Moura 90), Geromel, Kannemann, Bruno Cortez, Jailson, Michel (Everton 72), Ramiro, Luan, Fernandinho (Rafael Thyere 117), Barrios (Jael 55).
Pachuca: Perez - Martinez, Gonzalez, Murillo, Garcia (Sagal 101), Hernandez, Urretaviscaya (Cano 105), Honda, Guzman, Aguirre (Sanchez 67), Jara (Herrera 90). *Sent off: Guzman110.*

Dec13 - Abu Dhabi
Al Jazira 1 (Romarinho 41)
Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Cristiano Ronaldo 53, Bale 81)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 36,650. **Ref:** Ricci (Bra)
Al Jazira: Khasif (Al Senani 51) - M Al Attas, Fayez, Ayed, Juma, Rashid, Al Hosani (Rabia 72), Al Hammadi (Al Otaibah 60), Boussoufa, Romarinho, Mabkhout.
Real Madrid: Navas - Hakimi, Varane, Nacho, Marcelo, Modric, Casemiro, Kovacic (Lucas Vazquez 68), Isco (Marco Asensio 68), Benzema (Bale 81), Cristiano Ronaldo.

3rd-place match

Dec16 - Abu Dhabi
Al Jazira 1 (Mubarak 57)
Pachuca 4 (Urretaviscaya 37, Jara 60, De la Rosa 79, Sagal pen 84)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 11,785. **Ref:** Diedhiou (Sen)
Al Jazira: Al Senani - Rashid, S Khalfan, Juma, Fayez, Al Hosani (Ramadan 67), M Al Attas (Ali 46), Boussoufa, Mubarak (Rabia 78), Mabkhout, Romarinho.
Pachuca: Blanco - R Lopez, Gonzalez, Murillo, Garcia, Hernandez (P Lopez 85), Urretaviscaya (Figueroa 86), Aguirre, Sanchez, Sagal, Jara (De la Rosa 78).

Final

Dec16 - Abu Dhabi
Real Madrid 1 (Cristiano Ronaldo 53)
Gremio 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 41,094. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)
Real Madrid: Navas - Carvajal, Varane, Sergio Ramos, Marcelo, Modric, Casemiro, Kroos, Isco (Lucas Vazquez 73), Benzema (Bale 79), Cristiano Ronaldo.
Gremio: Marcelo Grohe - Edilson, Geromel, Kannemann, Bruno Cortez, Jailson, Michel (Maicon 84), Ramiro (Everton 71), Luan, Fernandinho, Barrios (Jael 63).

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Final

1st leg

Nov 22
Gremio (Bra) 1 (Cicero 83)
Lanus (Arg) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 55,188. **Ref:** Bascunan (Chl)
Gremio: Marcelo Grohe - Edilson, Geromel, Kannemann, Bruno Cortez, Arthur, Jailson (Cicero 72), Ramiro, Luan, Fernandinho (Everton 57), Barrios (Jael 74).
Lanus: Andrada - Gomez, Garcia, Braghieri, Velazquez (Aguirre 79), Martinez, Marcone, Pasquini, Silva, Sand, Acosta.

2nd leg

Nov 29
Lanus 1 (Sand pen 72)
Gremio 2 (Fernandinho 27, Luan 42)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Caceres (Par)
Gremio 3-1 on agg
Lanus: Andrada - Gomez, Herrera (Moreno 66), Garcia, Velazquez (Denis 88), Martinez, Marcone, Pasquini, Silva (Rojas 78), Sand, Acosta.
Gremio: Marcelo Grohe - Edilson, Geromel, Bressan (Rafael Thyere 82), Bruno Cortez, Arthur (Michel 51), Jailson, Ramiro, Luan, Fernandinho, Barrios (Cicero 76). *Sent off: Ramiro 83.*

SUDAMERICANA CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs - Nov 21/23; 2nd legs - Nov 28/30
Flamengo (Bra) v Junior (Col) 2-1, 2-0 (agg 4-1)
Libertad (Par) v Independiente (Arg) 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)

Final

1st leg

Dec 6
Independiente 2 (Gigliotti 29, Meza 53)
Flamengo 1 (Rever 9)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Diaz de Vivar (Par)
Independiente: Campana - Bustos, Franco (Amorebieta 85), Silva, Tagliafico, Rodriguez, Sanchez Mino, Meza (Domingo 79), Barco, Benitez (Martinez 72), Gigliotti.
Flamengo: Cesar - Para, Rever, Juan, Trauco, Willian Arao, Cuellar, Everton Ribeiro, Diego (Vinicius Junior 73), Lucas Paqueta (Everton 57), Felipe Vizeu.

2nd leg

Dec13
Flamengo 1 (Lucas Paqueta 30)
Independiente 1 (Barco pen 40)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 62,567. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Independiente 3-2 on agg
Flamengo: Cesar - Para, Rever, Juan, Trauco (Vinicius Junior 55), Willian Arao, Cuellar (Everton Ribeiro 79), Lucas Paqueta (Lincoln 85), Diego, Everton, Felipe Vizeu. *Sent off: Cuellar (from the bench) 90+4.*
Independiente: Campana - Bustos (Silva 85), Franco, Amorebieta, Tagliafico, Domingo, Rodriguez, Benitez (Albertengo 34), Meza (Sanchez Mino 83), Barco, Gigliotti.

BRAZIL

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Corinthians (C)	38	21	9	8	50	30	72
Palmeiras	38	19	6	13	61	45	63
Santos	38	17	12	9	42	32	63
Gremio	38	18	8	12	55	36	62
Cruzeiro	38	15	12	11	47	39	57
Flamengo	38	15	11	12	49	38	56
Vasco da Gama	38	15	11	12	40	47	56
Chapecoense	38	15	9	14	47	49	54
Atl Mineiro	38	14	12	12	52	49	54
Botafogo	38	14	11	13	45	42	53
Atl Paranaense	38	14	9	15	45	43	51
Bahia	38	13	11	14	50	48	50
Sao Paulo	38	13	11	14	48	49	50
Fluminense	38	11	14	13	50	53	47
Sport	38	12	9	17	46	58	45
Vitoria	38	11	10	17	50	58	43
Coritiba (R)	38	11	10	17	42	51	43
Avai (R)	38	10	13	15	29	48	43
Ponte Preta (R)	38	10	9	19	37	52	39
Goianiense (R)	38	9	9	20	38	56	36

CHILE

2017 – TRANSITION CHAMPIONSHIP[1] – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colo Colo (C)	15	10	3	2	33	13	33
U Espanola	15	9	4	2	18	12	31
Univ Chile	15	9	3	3	21	18	30
Everton	15	7	5	3	24	19	26
Audax Italiano	15	7	4	4	24	19	25
Dep Temuco	15	5	7	3	15	12	22
Antofagasta	15	5	6	4	14	13	21
Curico Unido	15	5	3	7	11	14	18
San Luis	15	5	3	7	15	20	18
U Concepcion	15	3	8	4	16	15	17
Univ Catolica	15	4	4	7	17	19	16
Huachipato	15	5	1	9	11	17	16
S Wanderers[2]	15	2	9	4	16	17	15
O'Higgins	15	4	3	8	15	24	15
Palestino	15	3	4	8	18	24	13
Dep Iquique	15	2	3	10	8	20	9

[1]This was a single-round championship to allow Chile to revert to a calendar-year season
[2]Enter rel/prom play-offs as the team with the lowest points-per-game average over the 2016-17 and 2017 Transition seasons

PARAGUAY

2017 – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
C Porteno (C)	22	14	3	5	41	23	45
Olimpia	22	12	6	4	37	20	42
Guarani	22	12	1	9	36	29	37
General Diaz	22	9	8	5	30	21	35
Luqueno	22	9	6	7	36	31	33
Sol America	22	7	7	8	26	32	28
Nacional	22	6	9	7	26	30	27
Libertad	22	7	5	10	26	27	26
Capiata	22	6	8	8	19	22	26
Rubio Nu (R)[1]	22	6	7	9	16	25	25
Trinidense (R)[1]	22	4	7	11	20	28	19
Independiente	22	5	3	14	16	41	18

[1]The 2 teams with the lowest points-per-game average over the 3 most recent seasons were relegated (Rubio Nu had the joint second worst average with Independiente, and were relegated after losing a play-off against them)

PERU

2017 – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Alianza Lima[1]	15	11	1	3	23	15	34
Real Garcilaso	15	10	2	3	29	15	32
Melgar	15	9	4	2	30	12	31
Universitario[2]	15	9	3	3	29	19	29
Dep Municipal	15	6	5	4	23	20	23
Sp Rosario	15	5	5	5	20	17	20
Sp Huancayo	15	5	5	5	22	22	20
UT Cajamarca	15	6	2	7	17	17	20
Sp Cristal	15	5	3	7	27	24	18
J Aurich (R)[3]	15	5	2	8	22	28	17
Ac Cantolao[2]	15	4	6	5	13	22	17
Comerciantes	15	4	3	8	23	25	15
Ayacucho	15	3	5	7	18	26	14
U San Martin	15	4	2	9	20	29	14
U Comercio	15	3	4	8	15	22	13
Alianza Atl (R)[3]	15	3	4	8	13	31	13

[1]Alianza Lima are the overall season champions because they also won the apertura tournament
[2]1pt deducted for an unpaid debt
[3]The 2 teams with fewest points in the combined season table were relegated

URUGUAY

2017 – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Penarol (Q)	15	14	0	1	39	7	42
Defensor	15	10	3	2	27	17	33
Nacional	15	9	2	4	29	15	29
River Plate	15	6	6	3	23	16	24
S America (R)[1]	15	6	4	5	26	24	22
Danubio	15	5	5	5	18	24	20
Cerro	15	6	2	7	17	24	20
Boston River	15	5	4	6	13	15	19
Rampla Jnrs	15	4	6	5	15	19	18
Fenix	15	4	5	6	17	17	17
Liverpool	15	5	2	8	23	25	17
Racing	15	4	5	6	18	22	17
Wanderers	15	4	4	7	21	26	16
Tanque Sisley	15	3	7	5	15	22	16
Juventud (R)[1]	15	3	2	10	14	28	11
P Colonia (R)[1]	15	2	3	10	12	26	9

As clausura winners, Penarol qualified for the Overall 2017 Championship semi-final, against apertura winners Defensor
[1]The 3 teams with the lowest points-per-game average over the 2 most recent seasons were relegated (Sud America had the joint third worst average with El Tanque Sisley, and were relegated after losing a play-off against them)

Overall 2017 Championship semi-final

Dec 10: Penarol 0 Defensor 0 (Penarol 4-2 on pens). *As Penarol had also earned a berth in the Overall 2017 Championship Final by topping the combined apertura/clausura table[1], they became overall season champions after winning the semi-final ([1]they'd finished level on points with Defensor in the combined table, then beat them in a play-off to decide who won it outright)*

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Sep12
Benfica (Por) 1 (Seferovic 50)
CSKA Moscow (Rus) 2 (Vitinho pen 63, Zhamaletdinov 71)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 38,323. **Ref:** Undiano Mal'co (Spa)

Manchester United (Eng) 3 (Fellaini 35, Lukaku 53, Rashford 84)
Basle (Swi) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 73,854. **Ref:** Buquet (Fra)

Sep 27
Basle 5 (Lang 2, Oberlin 20, 69, Van Wolfswinkel pen 60, Riveros 76)
Benfica 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 34,111. **Ref:** Thomson (Sco)
Sent off: Andre Almeida (Benfica) 62

CSKA Moscow 1 (Kuchaev 90)
Manchester United 4 (Lukaku 4, 27, Martial pen 19, Mkhitaryan 57)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 29,073. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)

Oct18
Benfica 0
Manchester United 1 (Rashford 64)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 57,684. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)
Sent off: Luisao (Benfica) 90+2

CSKA Moscow 0
Basle 2 (Xhaka 29, Oberlin 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 27,996. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)

Oct 31
Basle 1 (Zuffi 32)
CSKA Moscow 2 (Dzagoev 65, Wernbloom 79)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 33,303. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)

Manchester United 2 (Svilar og 45, Blind pen 78)
Benfica 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 74,437. **Ref:** Mazeika (Lit)

Nov 22
Basle 1 (Lang 89)
Manchester United 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 36,000. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)

CSKA Moscow 2 (Schennikov 13, Jardel og 56)
Benfica 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 27,709. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)

Dec 5
Benfica 0
Basle 2 (Elyounoussi 5, Oberlin 65)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 22,470. **Ref:** Gil Manzano (Spa)

Manchester United 2 (Lukaku 64, Rashford 66)
CSKA Moscow 1 (Vitinho 45)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 74,669. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd (Q)	6	5	0	1	12	3	15
Basle (Q)	6	4	0	2	11	5	12
CSKA M (EL)	6	3	0	3	8	10	9
Benfica	6	0	0	6	1	14	0

Group B

Sep12
Bayern Munich (Ger) 3 (Lewandowski pen 12, Thiago 65, Kimmich 90)
Anderlecht (Blg) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Tagliavento (Ita)
Sent off: Kums (Anderlecht) 11

Celtic (Sco) 0
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 5 (Neymar 19, Mbappe 34, Cavani pen 40, 85, Lustig og 83)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 57,562. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)

Sep 27
Anderlecht 0
Celtic 3 (Griffiths 38, Roberts 50, Sinclair 90+3)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 19,898. **Ref:** Gil Manzano (Spa)

Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Daniel Alves 2, Cavani 31, Neymar 63)
Bayern Munich 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 46,252. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)

Oct18
Anderlecht 0
Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Mbappe 3, Cavani 44, Neymar 66, Di Maria 88)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 19,108. **Ref:** Kralovec (CzR)

Bayern Munich 3 (Muller 17, Kimmich 29, Hummels 51)
Celtic 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)

Oct 31
Celtic 1 (McGregor 74)
Bayern Munich 2 (Coman 22, Javi Martinez 77)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 58,269. **Ref:** Makkelie (Hol)

Paris Saint-Germain 5 (Verratti 30, Neymar 45+4, Kurzawa 52, 72, 78)
Anderlecht 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 46,403. **Ref:** Fernandez B'lan (Spa)

Nov 22
Anderlecht 1 (Hanni 63)
Bayern Munich 2 (Lewandowski 51, Tolisso 77)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 19,753. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)

Paris Saint-Germain 7 (Neymar 9, 22, Cavani 28, 79, Mbappe 35, Verratti 75, Daniel Alves 80)
Celtic 1 (Dembele 1)
HT: 4-1. **Att:** 46,288. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)

Dec 5
Bayern Munich 3 (Lewandowski 8, Tolisso 37, 69)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Mbappe 50)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)

Celtic 0
Anderlecht 1 (Simunovic og 62)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 57,931. **Ref:** Jug (Sln)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSG (Q)	6	5	0	1	25	4	15
Bayern M (Q)	6	5	0	1	13	6	15
Celtic (EL)	6	1	0	5	5	18	3
Anderlecht	6	1	0	5	2	17	3

Group C

Sep12
Chelsea (Eng) 6 (Pedro 5, Zappacosta 30, Azpilicueta 55, Bakayoko 71, Batshuayi 76, Medvedev og 82)
Qarabag (Aze) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 41,150. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)

Roma (Ita) 0
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 0
Att: 36,064. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)

Sep 27
Atletico Madrid 1 (Griezmann pen 40)
Chelsea 2 (Morata 60, Batshuayi 90+3)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 60,643. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)

Qarabag 1 (Pedro Henrique 28)
Roma 2 (Manolas 7, Dzeko 15)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 67,200. **Ref:** Dias (Por)

Oct18
Chelsea 3 (David Luiz 11, Hazard 37, 75)
Roma 3 (Kolarov 40, Dzeko 64, 70)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 41,105. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)

Qarabag 0
Atletico Madrid 0
Att: 47,923. **Ref:** Buquet (Fra)
Sent off: Ndlovu (Qarabag) 75

Oct 31
Atletico Madrid 1 (Partey 56)
Qarabag 1 (Michel 40)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 55,893. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)
Sent off: Pedro Henrique (Qarabag) 59; Savic (Atletico Madrid) 88

Roma 3 (El Shaarawy 1, 36, Perotti 63)
Chelsea 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 55,036. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)

Nov 22
Atletico Madrid 2 (Griezmann 69, Gameiro 85)
Roma 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 56,253. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)
Sent off: Bruno Peres (Roma) 83

Qarabag 0
Chelsea 4 (Hazard pen 21, Willian 36, 85, Fabregas pen 73)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 67,100. **Ref:** Sousa (Por)
Sent off: Sadygov (Qarabag) 19

Dec 5
Chelsea 1 (Savic og 75)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Saul 56)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 40,875. **Ref:** Makkelie (Hol)

Roma 1 (Perotti 53)
Qarabag 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 34,258. **Ref:** Stieler (Ger)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Roma (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Chelsea (Q)	6	3	2	1	16	8	11
Atl Madrid (EL)	6	1	4	1	5	4	7
Qarabag	6	0	2	4	2	14	2

Group D

Sep12
Barcelona (Spa) 3 (Messi 45, 69, Rakitic 56)
Juventus (Ita) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 78,656. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)

Olympiakos (Gre) 2 (Pardo 89, 90+3)
Sporting Lisbon (Por) 3 (Doumbia 2, Gelson Martins 13, Bruno Fernandes 43)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 30,168. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)

Sep 27
Juventus 2 (Higuain 69, Mandzukic 80)
Olympiakos 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 33,460. **Ref:** Stieler (Ger)

Sporting Lisbon 0
Barcelona 1 (Coates og 49)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 48,575. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)

Oct18
Barcelona 3 (Nikolaou og 18, Messi 61, Digne 64)
Olympiakos 1 (Nikolaou 90)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 55,026. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Sent off: Pique (Barcelona) 42

Juventus 2 (Pjanic 29, Mandzukic 84)
Sporting Lisbon 1 (Alex Sandro og 12)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 36,288. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

Oct 31
Olympiakos 0
Barcelona 0
Att: 31,600. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)

Sporting Lisbon 1 (Bruno Cesar 20)
Juventus 1 (Higuain 79)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 48,442. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

Nov 22
Juventus 0
Barcelona 0
Att: 40,876. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)

Sporting Lisbon 3 (Dost 40, 66, Bruno Cesar 43)
Olympiakos 1 (Odjidja 86)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 42,528. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)

Dec 5
Barcelona 2 (Paco Alcacer 59, Mathieu og 90+1)
Sporting Lisbon 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 48,336. **Ref:** Thomson (Sco)

Olympiakos 0
Juventus 2 (Cuadrado 15, Bernardeschi 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 29,567. **Ref:** Fernandez B'lan (Spa)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona (Q)	6	4	2	0	9	1	14
Juventus (Q)	6	3	2	1	7	5	11
Sporting L (EL)	6	2	1	3	8	9	7
Olympiakos	6	0	1	5	4	13	1

Group E

Sep13
Liverpool (Eng) 2 (Roberto Firmino 21, Salah 37)
Sevilla (Spa) 2 (Ben Yedder 5, Correa 72)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 52,332. **Ref:** Makkelie (Hol)
Sent off: Gomez (Liverpool) 90+4

Maribor (Sln) 1 (Bohar 85)
Spartak Moscow (Rus) 1 (Samedov 59)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 12,566. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)

Sep 26
Sevilla 3 (Ben Yedder 27, 38, pen 83)
Maribor 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 34,705. **Ref:** Kulbakov (Bls)

Spartak Moscow 1 (Fernando 23)
Liverpool 1 (Philippe Coutinho 31)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 43,376. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

Oct17
Maribor 0
Liverpool 7 (Roberto Firmino 4, 54, Philippe Coutinho 13, Salah 19, 40, Oxlade-Chamberlain 86, Alexander-Arnold 90)
HT: 0-4. **Att:** 12,506. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)

Spartak Moscow 5 (Promes 18, 90, Melgarejo 58, Glushakov 67, Luiz Adriano 74)
Sevilla 1 (Kjaer 30)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 44,307. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)

Nov1
Liverpool 3 (Salah 49, Can 64, Sturridge 90)
Maribor 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 47,957. **Ref:** Kruzliak (Slk)

Sevilla 2 (Lenglet 30, Banega 59)
Spartak Moscow 1 (Ze Luis 78)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 38,002. **Ref:** Dias (Por)

Nov 21
Sevilla 3 (Ben Yedder 51, pen 60, Pizarro 90+3)
Liverpool 3 (Roberto Firmino 2, 30, Mane 22)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 39,495. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)

Spartak Moscow 1 (Ze Luis 82)
Maribor 1 (Mesanovic 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 42,920. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)

Dec 6
Liverpool 7 (Philippe Coutinho pen 4, 15, 50, Roberto Firmino 19, Mane 47, 76, Salah 86)
Spartak Moscow 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 48,779. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)

Maribor 1 (Tavares 10)
Sevilla 1 (Ganso 75)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 11,976. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool (Q)	6	3	3	0	23	6	12
Sevilla (Q)	6	2	3	1	12	12	9
Spartak M (EL)	6	1	3	2	9	13	6
Maribor	6	0	3	3	3	16	3

Group F

Sep13
Feyenoord (Hol) 0
Manchester City (Eng) 4 (Stones 2, 63, Aguero 10, Gabriel Jesus 25)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 43,500. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)

Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 2 (Taison 15, Ferreyra 58)
Napoli (Ita) 1 (Milik pen 72)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 32,679. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)

Sep 26
Manchester City 2 (De Bruyne 48, Sterling 90)
Shakhtar Donetsk 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 45,310. **Ref:** Sousa (Por)

Napoli 3 (Insigne 7, Mertens 49, Callejon 70)
Feyenoord 1 (Amrabat 90+3)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 22,577. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)

Oct17
Feyenoord 1 (Berghuis 8)
Shakhtar Donetsk 2 (Bernard 24, 54)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 43,500. **Ref:** Undiano Mal'co (Spa)
Sent off: Rakitskyi (Shakhtar) 75

Manchester City 2 (Sterling 9, Gabriel Jesus 13)
Napoli 1 (Diawara pen 73)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 48,520. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)

Nov1
Napoli 2 (Insigne 21, Jorginho pen 62)
Manchester City 4 (Otamendi 34, Stones 48, Aguero 69, Sterling 90+2)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 44,483. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)

Shakhtar Donetsk 3 (Ferreyra 14, Marlos 17, 68)
Feyenoord 1 (Jorgensen 12)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 24,570. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)

Nov 21
Manchester City 1 (Sterling 88)
Feyenoord 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 43,548. **Ref:** Kruzliak (Slk)

Napoli 3 (Insigne 56, Zielinski 81, Mertens 83)
Shakhtar Donetsk 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,573. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)

Dec 6
Feyenoord 2 (Jorgensen 33, St Juste 90+1)
Napoli 1 (Zielinski 2)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 36,500. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)
Sent off: Vilhena (Feyenoord) 83

Shakhtar Donetsk 2 (Bernard 26, Ismaily 32)
Manchester City 1 (Aguero pen 90+2)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 33,154. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City (Q)	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
Shakhtar (Q)	6	4	0	2	9	9	12
Napoli (EL)	6	2	0	4	11	11	6
Feyenoord	6	1	0	5	5	14	3

Group G

Sep13
Porto (Por) 1 (Tosic og 21)
Besiktas (Tur) 3 (Talisca 13, Tosun 28, Babel 86)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 42,429. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)

RB Leipzig (Ger) 1 (Forsberg 33)
Monaco (Fra) 1 (Tielemans 34)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 40,068. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

Sep 26
Besiktas 2 (Babel 11, Talisca 43)
RB Leipzig 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 36,641. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)

Monaco 0
Porto 3 (Aboubakar 31, 69, Layun 89)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 11,703. **Ref:** Vincic (Sln)

Oct17
Monaco 1 (Falcao 30)
Besiktas 2 (Tosun 34, 54)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 7,403. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)

RB Leipzig 3 (Orban 8, Forsberg 38, Augustin 41)
Porto 2 (Aboubakar 18, Marcano 44)
HT: 3-2. **Att:** 41,496. **Ref:** Tagliavento (Ita)

Nov1
Besiktas 1 (Tosun pen 54)
Monaco 1 (Rony Lopes 45+1)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 39,346. **Ref:** Tagliavento (Ita)

Porto 3 (Herrera 13, Danilo Pereira 61, M Pereira 90+3)
RB Leipzig 1 (Werner 48)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 41,616. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)

Nov 21
Besiktas 1 (Talisca 41)
Porto 1 (Felipe 29)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 36,919. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)

Monaco 1 (Falcao 43)
RB Leipzig 4 (Jemerson og 6, Werner 9, pen 31, Keita 45)
HT: 1-4. **Att:** 9,029. **Ref:** Undiano Mal'co (Spa)

Dec 6
Porto 5 (Aboubakar 9, 33, Brahimi 45, Alex Telles 65, Soares 88)
Monaco 2 (Glik pen 61, Falcao 78)
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 42,509. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Sent off: Felipe (Porto) 38; Ghezzal (Monaco) 38

RB Leipzig 1 (Keita 87)
Besiktas 2 (Negredo pen 10, Talisca 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 42,558. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Sent off: Ilsanker (RB Leipzig) 82

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Besiktas (Q)	6	4	2	0	11	5	14
Porto (Q)	6	3	1	2	15	10	10
RB Leipzig (EL)	6	2	1	3	10	11	7
Monaco	6	0	2	4	6	16	2

Group H

Sep13
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Cristiano Ronaldo 12, pen 51, Sergio Ramos 61)
APOEL (Cyp) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 71,060. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)

Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 3 (Son 4, Kane 15, 60)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 1 (Yarmolenko 11)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 67,343. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
Sent off: Vertonghen (Tottenham) 90+2

Sep 26
APOEL 0
Tottenham Hotspur 3 (Kane 39, 62, 67)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 16,324. **Ref:** Kralovec (CzR)

Borussia Dortmund 1 (Aubameyang 54)
Real Madrid 3 (Bale 18, Cristiano Ronaldo 50, 79)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 65,849. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)

Oct17
APOEL 1 (Pote 62)
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Papastathopoulos 67)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,604. **Ref:** Kulbakov (Bls)

Real Madrid 1 (Cristiano Ronaldo pen 43)
Tottenham Hotspur 1 (Varane og 28)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 76,589. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)

Nov1
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Raphael Guerreiro 29)
APOEL 1 (Pote 51)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 64,500. **Ref:** Jug (Sln)

Tottenham Hotspur 3 (Alli 27, 56, Eriksen 65)
Real Madrid 1 (Cristiano Ronaldo 80)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 83,782. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)

Nov 21
APOEL 0
Real Madrid 6 (Modric 23, Benzema 39, 45+1, Nacho 41, Cristiano Ronaldo 49, 54)
HT: 0-4. **Att:** 19,705. **Ref:** Dias (Por)

Borussia Dortmund 1 (Aubameyang 31)
Tottenham Hotspur 2 (Kane 49, Son 76)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 65,849. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

Dec 6
Real Madrid 3 (Mayoral 8, Cristiano Ronaldo 12, Lucas Vazquez 81)
Borussia Dortmund 2 (Aubameyang 43, 49)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 73,323. **Ref:** Kralovec (CzR)

Tottenham Hotspur 3 (Llorente 20, Son 37, N'Koudou 80)
APOEL 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 42,679. **Ref:** Vincic (Sln)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tottenham (Q)	6	5	1	0	15	4	16
Real Madrid (Q)	6	4	1	1	17	7	13
Dortmund (EL)	6	0	2	4	7	13	2
APOEL	6	0	2	4	2	17	2

● *The top 2 in each group have qualified for the 1st knockout round (last16); the 3rd-placed teams enter the Europa League at the1st knockout round (last 32) stage*

EUROPA LEAGUE

Group A

Sep 14: Slavia Prague (CzR) 1 Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) 0; Villarreal (Spa) 3 Astana (Kaz) 1. **Sep 28:** Astana 1 Slavia Prague 1; Maccabi Tel Aviv 0 Villarreal 0. **Oct 19:** Astana 4 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0; Villarreal 2 Slavia Prague 2. **Nov 2:** Maccabi Tel Aviv 0 Astana 1; Slavia Prague 0 Villarreal 2. **Nov 23:** Astana 2 Villarreal 3; Maccabi Tel Aviv 0 Slavia Prague 2. **Dec 7:** Slavia Prague 0 Astana 1; Villarreal 0 Maccabi Tel Aviv 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Villarreal (Q)	6	3	2	1	10	6	11
Astana (Q)	6	3	1	2	10	7	10
Slavia Prague	6	2	2	2	6	6	8
Mac Tel Aviv	6	1	1	4	1	8	4

Group B

Sep 14: Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 3 Skenderbeu (Alb) 1; Young Boys (Swi) 1 Partizan Belgrade (Ser) 1. **Sep 28:** Partizan Belgrade 2 Dynamo Kiev 3; Skenderbeu 1 Young Boys 1. **Oct 19:** Dynamo Kiev 2 Young Boys 2; Skenderbeu 0 Partizan Belgrade 0. **Nov 2:** Partizan Belgrade 2 Skenderbeu 0; Young Boys 0 Dynamo Kiev 1. **Nov 23:** Partizan Belgrade 2 Young Boys 1; Skenderbeu 3 Dynamo Kiev 2. **Dec 7:** Dynamo Kiev 4 Partizan Belgrade 1; Young Boys 2 Skenderbeu 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo K (Q)	6	4	1	1	15	9	13
Partizan B (Q)	6	2	2	2	8	9	8
Young Boys	6	1	3	2	7	8	6
Skenderbeu	6	1	2	3	6	10	5

Group C

Sep 14: Hoffenheim (Ger) 1 Sporting Braga (Por) 2; Basaksehir (Tur) 0 Ludogorets (Bul) 0. **Sep 28:** Ludogorets 2 Hoffenheim 1; Sporting Braga 2 Basaksehir 1. **Oct 19:** Hoffenheim 3 Basaksehir 1; Sporting Braga 0 Ludogorets 2. **Nov 2:** Basaksehir 1 Hoffenheim 1; Ludogorets 1 Sporting Braga 1. **Nov 23:** Ludogorets 1 Basaksehir 2; Sporting Braga 3 Hoffenheim 1. **Dec 7:** Basaksehir 2 Sporting Braga 1; Hoffenheim 1 Ludogorets 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sp Braga (Q)	6	3	1	2	9	8	10
Ludogorets (Q)	6	2	3	1	7	5	9
Basaksehir	6	2	2	2	7	8	8
Hoffenheim	6	1	2	3	8	10	5

Group D

Sep 14: Austria Vienna (Aut) 1 Milan (Ita) 5; Rijeka (Cro) 1 AEK Athens (Gre) 2. **Sep 28:** AEK Athens 2 Austria Vienna 2; Milan 3 Rijeka 2. **Oct 19:** Austria Vienna 1 Rijeka 3; Milan 0 AEK Athens 0. **Nov 2:** AEK Athens 0 Milan 0; Rijeka 1 Austria Vienna 4. **Nov 23:** AEK Athens 2 Rijeka 2; Milan 5 Austria Vienna 1. **Dec 7:** Austria Vienna 0 AEK Athens 0; Rijeka 2 Milan 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Milan (Q)	6	3	2	1	13	6	11
AEK Athens (Q)	6	1	5	0	6	5	8
Rijeka	6	2	1	3	11	12	7
Austria Vienna	6	1	2	3	9	16	5

Group E

Sep 14: Apollon (Cyp) 1 Lyon (Fra) 1; Atalanta (Ita) 3 Everton (Eng) 0. **Sep 28:** Everton 2 Apollon 2; Lyon 1 Atalanta 1. **Oct 19:** Atalanta 3 Apollon 1; Everton 1 Lyon 2. **Nov 2:** Apollon 1 Atalanta 1; Lyon 3 Everton 0. **Nov 23:** Everton 1 Atalanta 5; Lyon 4 Apollon 0. **Dec 7:** Apollon 0 Everton 3; Atalanta 1 Lyon 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atalanta (Q)	6	4	2	0	14	4	14
Lyon (Q)	6	3	2	1	11	4	11
Everton	6	1	1	4	7	15	4
Apollon	6	0	3	3	5	14	3

Group F

Sep 14: Copenhagen (Den) 0 Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 0; Zlin (CzR) 0 Sheriff (Mol) 0. **Sep 28:** Lokomotiv Moscow 3 Zlin 0; Sheriff 0 Copenhagen 0. **Oct 19:** Sheriff 1 Lokomotiv Moscow 1; Zlin 1 Copenhagen 1. **Nov 2:** Copenhagen 3 Zlin 0; Lokomotiv Moscow 1 Sheriff 2. **Nov 23:** Lokomotiv Moscow 2 Copenhagen 1; Sheriff 1 Zlin 0. **Dec 7:** Copenhagen 2 Sheriff 0; Zlin 0 Lokomotiv Moscow 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lok Moscow (Q)	6	3	2	1	9	4	11
Cop'hagen (Q)	6	2	3	1	7	3	9
Sheriff	6	2	3	1	4	4	9
Zlin	6	0	2	4	1	10	2

Group G

Sep 14: Hapoel Beer Sheva (Isr) 2 Lugano (Swi) 1; FCSB (Rom) 3 Viktoria Plzen (CzR) 0. **Sep 28:** Lugano 1 FCSB 2; Viktoria Plzen 3 Hapoel Beer Sheva 1. **Oct 19:** Hapoel Beer Sheva 1 FCSB 2; Lugano 3 Viktoria Plzen 2. **Nov 2:** FCSB 1 Hapoel Beer Sheva 1; Viktoria Plzen 4 Lugano 1. **Nov 23:** Lugano 1 Hapoel Beer Sheva 0; Viktoria Plzen 2 FCSB 0. **Dec 7:** FCSB 1 Lugano 2; Hapoel Beer Sheva 0 Viktoria Plzen 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vik Plzen (Q)	6	4	0	2	13	8	12
FCSB (Q)	6	3	1	2	9	7	10
Lugano	6	3	0	3	9	11	9
Beer Sheva	6	1	1	4	5	10	4

Group H

Sep 14: Arsenal (Eng) 3 Cologne (Ger) 1; Red Star Belgrade (Ser) 1 BATE Borisov (Bls) 1. **Sep 28:** BATE Borisov 2 Arsenal 4; Cologne 0 Red Star Belgrade 1. **Oct 19:** BATE Borisov 1 Cologne 0; Red Star Belgrade 0 Arsenal 1. **Nov 2:** Arsenal 0 Red Star Belgrade 0; Cologne 5 BATE Borisov 2. **Nov 23:** BATE Borisov 0 Red Star Belgrade 0; Cologne 1 Arsenal 0. **Dec 7:** Arsenal 6 BATE Borisov 0; Red Star Belgrade 1 Cologne 0.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal (Q)	6	4	1	1	14	4	13
Red Star (Q)	6	2	3	1	3	2	9
Cologne	6	2	0	4	7	8	6
BATE Borisov	6	1	2	3	6	16	5

Group I

Sep 14: Marseille (Fra) 1 Konyaspor (Tur) 0; Vitoria Guimaraes (Por) 1 Salzburg (Aut) 1. **Sep 28:** Konyaspor 2 Vitoria Guimaraes 1; Salzburg 1 Marseille 0. **Oct 19:** Konyaspor 0 Salzburg 2; Marseille 2 Vitoria Guimaraes 1. **Nov 2:** Salzburg 0 Konyaspor 0; Vitoria Guimaraes 1 Marseille 0. **Nov 23:** Konyaspor 1 Marseille 1; Salzburg 3 Vitoria Guimaraes 0. **Dec 7:** Marseille 0 Salzburg 0; Vitoria Guimaraes 1 Konyaspor 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP I – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg (Q)	6	3	3	0	7	1	12
Marseille (Q)	6	2	2	2	4	4	8
Konyaspor	6	1	3	2	4	6	6
Guimaraes	6	1	2	3	5	9	5

Group J

Sep 14: Hertha Berlin (Ger) 0 Athletic Bilbao (Spa) 0; Zorya Luhansk (Ukr) 0 Ostersund (Swe) 2. **Sep 28:** Athletic Bilbao 0 Zorya Luhansk 1; Ostersund 1 Hertha Berlin 0. **Oct 19:** Ostersund 2 Athletic Bilbao 2; Zorya Luhansk 2 Hertha Berlin 1. **Nov 2:** Athletic Bilbao 1 Ostersund 0; Hertha Berlin 2 Zorya Luhansk 0. **Nov 23:** Athletic Bilbao 3 Hertha Berlin 2; Ostersund 2 Zorya Luhansk 0. **Dec 7:** Hertha Berlin 1 Ostersund 1; Zorya Luhansk 0 Athletic Bilbao 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP J – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ath Bilbao (Q)	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
Ostersund (Q)	6	3	2	1	8	4	11
Zorya	6	2	0	4	3	9	6
Hertha	6	1	2	3	6	7	5

Group K

Sep 14: Vitesse Arnhem (Hol) 2 Lazio (Ita) 3; Zulte Waregem (Blg) 1 Nice (Fra) 5. **Sep 28:** Lazio 2 Zulte Waregem 0; Nice 3 Vitesse Arnhem 0. **Oct 19:** Nice 1 Lazio 3; Zulte Waregem 1 Vitesse Arnhem 1. **Nov 2:** Lazio 1 Nice 0; Vitesse Arnhem 0 Zulte Waregem 2. **Nov 23:** Lazio 1 Vitesse Arnhem 1; Nice 3 Zulte Waregem 1. **Dec 7:** Vitesse Arnhem 1 Nice 0; Zulte Waregem 3 Lazio 2.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP K – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lazio (Q)	6	4	1	1	12	7	13
Nice (Q)	6	3	0	3	12	7	9
Z Waregem	6	2	1	3	8	13	7
Vitesse	6	1	2	3	5	10	5

Group L

Sep 14: Real Sociedad (Spa) 4 Rosenborg (Nor) 0; Vardar Skopje (Mac) 0 Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) 5. **Sep 28:** Rosenborg 3 Vardar Skopje 1; Zenit St Petersburg 3 Real Sociedad 1. **Oct 19:** Vardar Skopje 0 Real Sociedad 6; Zenit St Petersburg 3 Rosenborg 1. **Nov 2:** Real Sociedad 3 Vardar Skopje 0; Rosenborg 1 Zenit St Petersburg 1. **Nov 23:** Rosenborg 0 Real Sociedad 1; Zenit St Petersburg 2 Vardar Skopje 1. **Dec 7:** Real Sociedad 1 Zenit St Petersburg 3; Vardar Skopje 1 Rosenborg 1.

EUROPA LEAGUE – GROUP L – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit (Q)	6	5	1	0	17	5	16
R Sociedad (Q)	6	4	0	2	16	6	12
Rosenborg	6	1	2	3	6	11	5
Vardar	6	0	1	5	3	20	1

● *The top 2 in each group have qualified for the 1st knockout round (last 32)*

BELARUS

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BATE (C)	30	21	5	4	61	19	68
Dinamo Minsk	30	22	2	6	46	15	68
Shakhtyor	30	20	5	5	52	22	65
Dinamo Brest	30	14	9	7	47	26	51
Torpedo Z	30	14	9	7	43	27	51
Neman	30	14	7	9	42	32	49
Slutsk	30	12	8	10	30	34	44
Vitebsk	30	12	7	11	35	38	43
Gorodeya	30	8	14	8	37	35	38
Gomel	30	9	8	13	24	25	35
Isloch[1]	30	10	4	16	27	46	27
Dnepr	30	6	8	16	27	48	26
Krumkachy	30	5	10	15	26	47	25
FK Minsk	30	3	14	13	19	39	23
Slavia (R)	30	4	8	18	26	50	20
Naftan[2] (R)	30	4	6	20	18	57	13

[1] *7pts deducted*
[2] *5pts deducted*

GEORGIA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Torpedo (C)	36	23	7	6	59	27	76
Dinamo Tbil'i	36	23	6	7	79	29	75
Samtredia	36	20	8	8	62	39	68
Saburtalo	36	18	6	12	61	42	60
Chikhura	36	17	4	15	47	54	55
Lokomotive	36	16	5	15	63	53	53
Dila	36	11	8	17	41	51	41
Dinamo B (R)[1]	36	10	3	23	28	60	33
Kolkheti[2]	36	6	8	22	31	73	26
Shukura (R)	36	4	9	23	35	78	21

[1] *Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off*
[2] *Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off*

MOLDOVA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sheriff (C)	18	14	3	1	50	14	45
Milsami	18	13	1	4	26	12	40
Petrocub	18	7	5	6	25	16	26
Dacia	18	7	5	6	23	26	26
Zaria	18	7	3	8	28	20	24
Speranta	18	5	6	7	18	21	21
Sf Gheorghe	18	5	5	8	15	27	20
Zimbru	18	5	4	9	17	21	19
Dinamo-Auto	18	4	3	11	14	38	15
Spicul (R)	18	3	5	10	14	35	14

NORWAY

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rosenborg (C)	30	18	7	5	57	20	61
Molde	30	16	6	8	50	35	54
Sarpsborg	30	13	12	5	50	36	51
Stromsgodset	30	14	8	8	45	37	50
Brann	30	13	8	9	51	36	47
Odd	30	12	6	12	27	39	42
Kristiansund	30	10	10	10	44	46	40
Valerenga	30	11	6	13	48	46	39
Stabaek	30	10	9	11	46	50	39
Haugesund	30	11	6	13	35	39	39
Tromso	30	10	8	12	42	49	38
Lillestrom	30	10	7	13	40	43	37
Sandefjord	30	11	3	16	38	51	36
Sogndal (R)[1]	30	8	8	14	38	48	32
Aalesund (R)	30	8	8	14	38	50	32
Viking (R)	30	6	6	18	33	57	24

[1] *Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off*

CONCACAF

MEXICO

2017-18 – APERTURA: REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monterrey (Q)	17	11	4	2	29	12	37
Tigres (Q)	17	9	5	3	28	16	32
America (Q)	17	9	3	5	23	18	30
Morelia (Q)	17	8	5	4	25	17	29
Toluca (Q)	17	8	5	4	24	21	29
Cruz Azul (Q)	17	7	6	4	22	22	27
Leon (Q)	17	8	2	7	27	23	26
Atlas (Q)	17	7	4	6	23	19	25
Necaxa	17	6	6	5	19	15	24
Lobos	17	7	2	8	26	31	23
Tijuana	17	6	3	8	17	23	21
Pachuca	17	5	4	8	23	25	19
Guadalajara	17	4	6	7	21	23	18
Santos	17	3	9	5	20	23	18
Puebla	17	3	7	7	14	20	16
Queretaro	17	3	7	7	19	27	16
Veracruz	17	4	2	11	14	28	14
Pumas	17	3	4	10	14	25	13

The top 8 qualified for the quarter-finals

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Nov 22/23; 2nd legs - Nov 25/26
Atlas v Monterrey 1-2, 1-4 (agg 2-6)
Cruz Azul v America 0-0, 0-0 (agg 0-0, America on better regular-season record)
Leon v Tigres 1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2, Tigres on better regular-season record)
Toluca v Morelia 2-1, 1-2 (agg 3-3, Morelia on better regular-season record)

Semi-finals

1st legs - Nov 29/30; 2nd legs - Dec 2/3
America v Tigres 0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Morelia v Monterrey 0-1, 0-4 (agg 0-5)

2017-18 Apertura Final

1st leg - Dec 7; 2nd leg - Dec10
Tigres v Monterrey 1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2)

NICARAGUA

2017-18 Apertura Final
1st leg - Nov 25; 2nd leg - Dec 2
Managua v Walter Ferretti 1-1, 0-0
(agg 1-1, Walter Ferretti on away goals)

PANAMA

2017-18 Apertura Final
Dec 2: Arabe Unido 1 Chorrillo 5.

UNITED STATES

2017 – REGULAR: EASTERN CONFERENCE – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Toronto (Q)	34	20	9	5	74	37	69
NY City (Q)	34	16	9	9	56	43	57
Chicago (Q)	34	16	7	11	61	47	55
Atlanta (Q)	34	15	10	9	70	40	55
Columbus (Q)	34	16	6	12	53	49	54
NY RB (Q)	34	14	8	12	53	47	50
New England	34	13	6	15	53	61	45
Philadelphia	34	11	9	14	50	47	42
Montreal	34	11	6	17	52	58	39
Orlando	34	10	9	15	39	58	39
DC United	34	9	5	20	31	60	32

2017 – REGULAR: WESTERN CONFERENCE – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portland (Q)	34	15	8	11	60	50	53
Seattle (Q)	34	14	11	9	52	39	53
Vancouver (Q)	34	15	7	12	50	49	52
Houston (Q)	34	13	11	10	57	45	50
Kansas City (Q)	34	12	13	9	40	29	49
San Jose (Q)	34	13	7	14	39	60	46
Dallas	34	11	13	10	48	48	46
Salt Lake	34	13	6	15	49	55	45
Minnesota	34	10	6	18	47	70	36
Colorado	34	9	6	19	31	51	33
Los Angeles	34	8	8	18	45	67	32

The top 6 in both conferences qualified for the play-offs - 3rd to 6th going into the1st round, the top 2 directly into the quarter-finals

Play-offs 1st round
Oct 25: Chicago Fire 0 New York Red Bulls 4; Vancouver Whitecaps 5 San Jose Earthquakes 0.
Oct 26: Atlanta United 0 Columbus Crew 0 (aet, Columbus 3-1 on pens); Houston Dynamo 1 Sporting Kansas City 0 (aet).

Quarter-finals
1st legs - Oct 29-31; 2nd legs - Nov 2-5
Columbus Crew v New York City 4-1, 0-2 (agg 4-3)
Houston Dynamo v Portland Timbers
0-0, 2-1 (agg 2-1)
New York Red Bulls v Toronto
1-2, 1-0 (agg 2-2, Toronto on away goals)
Vancouver Whitecaps v Seattle Sounders
0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)

Semi-finals
1st legs - Nov 21; 2nd legs - Nov 29/30
Columbus Crew v Toronto 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Houston Dynamo v Seattle Sounders
0-2, 0-3 (agg 0-5)

2017 Championship Final (MLS Cup)
Dec 9: Toronto 2 Seattle Sounders 0.

AFRICA

CONFEDERATION CUP

Final

1st leg
Nov19
TP Mazembe (DRC) 2 (Traore 18, Nii Adjei 67)
SuperSport United (SAf) 1 (Mbule 48)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Abid Charef (Alg)
TP Mazembe: Matampi - Mpeko, Kimwaki, Chongo, Kasusula, Nii Adjei (Mputu 82), Sinkala, Ushindi (Asante 61), Kalaba (Meschak 58), Traore, Malango.
SuperSport United: Williams - Nhlapo, Daniels, Mashamaite, Modiba, Furman, Phala, Mbule, Wome (Kekana 81), Grobler (Farmer 85), Brockie (Lakay 73).

2nd leg
Nov 25
SuperSport United 0
TP Mazembe 0
Ref: Diedhiou (Sen)
TP Mazembe 2-1 on agg
SuperSport United: Williams - Nhlapo (Kekana 46), Daniels, Mashamaite, Modiba, Mbule (Nkhatha 81), Furman, Letsholonyane, Grobler, Brockie (Wome 66), Phala. *Sent off: Phala 90.*
TP Mazembe: Gbohouo - Mpeko, Kimwaki, Chongo, Zola, Koffi, Sinkala, Traore (Asante 74), Nii Adjei (Mika 64), Kalaba (Meschak 60), Malango. *Sent off: Chongo 82.*

LIBYA

2017 Championship Final
Nov 25: Al Ittihad 1 Al Tahadi 2.

SAO TOME E PRINCIPE

2017 National Championship Final
1st leg - Nov19; 2nd leg - Nov 26
UDRA v Operarios 2-0, 3-1 (agg 5-1)

SOUTH SUDAN

2017 Championship Final
Nov 26: El-Salam Wau 2 Kator Juba 1.

ZAMBIA

2017 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zesco Utd (C)	38	21	11	6	51	27	74
Zanaco	38	20	13	5	57	28	73
Nkana	38	21	8	9	53	29	71
Grn Buffaloes	38	20	10	8	47	26	70
L'ka Dynamos	38	17	12	9	44	33	63
Power Dy'mos	38	15	17	6	50	30	62
Napsa Stars	38	16	10	12	43	34	58
L'na Radiants	38	15	11	12	39	30	56
Buildcon	38	14	13	11	33	28	55
Red Arrows	38	12	16	10	42	36	52
Forest Rangers	38	13	10	15	37	39	49
Nkwazi	38	11	14	13	34	40	47
Green Eagles	38	10	14	14	31	36	44
Nak'a Leopards	38	8	20	10	24	34	44
Kabwe Wa'rs	38	8	19	11	32	35	43
Nchanga Rgrs	38	10	13	15	35	45	43
Mufulira W (R)	38	9	12	17	38	53	39
Konkola B (R)	38	6	10	22	24	52	28
Nakonde (R)	38	6	10	22	17	53	28
City Lusaka (R)	38	3	7	28	30	73	16

ZIMBABWE

2017 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Platinum (C)	34	20	12	2	40	15	72
Dynamos	34	21	7	6	55	26	70
Ngezi Platinum	34	19	8	7	54	30	65
Chicken Inn	34	18	7	9	34	22	61
CAPS United	34	15	13	6	43	29	58
Highlanders	34	13	8	13	35	35	47
Black Rhinos	34	12	10	12	35	30	46
How Mine	34	13	7	14	30	36	46
Triangle Utd	34	11	12	11	37	36	45
ZPC Kariba	34	12	9	13	30	32	45
Chapungu	34	11	11	12	25	27	44
Shabanie Mine	34	10	12	12	29	34	42
Yadah	34	10	10	14	31	40	40
Bulawayo City	34	11	6	17	37	44	39
Harare City (R)	34	10	8	16	29	29	38
Hwange (R)	34	10	7	17	29	38	37
Tsholotsho (R)	34	4	13	17	19	44	25
Bantu Rvrs (R)	34	4	4	26	28	73	16

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Final

1st leg
Nov18
Al Hilal (Sau) 1 (Khribin 37)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Jap) 1 (Rafael Silva 7)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 59,136. **Ref:** Makhadmeh (Jor)
Al Hilal: Al Maiouf - Al Burayk, Hawsawi, Jahfali, Al Shahrani, Al Faraj, Otayf (Fallatah 70), Milesi (Kanno 79), Al Dawsari, Carlos Eduardo (Al Abed 19), Khribin.
Urawa: Nishikawa - Endo, Abe, Makino, Ugajin, Aoki, Muto, Kashiwagi, Nagasawa (Umesaki 77), Rafael Silva (Ljubijankic 65), Koroki (Takagi 87).

2nd leg
Nov 25
Urawa Red Diamonds 1 (Rafael Silva 88)
Al Hilal 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 57,727. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Urawa Red Diamonds 2-1 on agg
Urawa: Nishikawa - Endo, Abe, Makino, Ugajin (Mauricio Antonio 74), Kashiwagi (Umesaki 90+5), Aoki, Muto, Nagasawa, Rafael Silva, Koroki (Ljubijankic 84).
Al Hilal: Al Maiouf - Al Burayk, Hawsawi, Jahfali, Al Shahrani, Otayf (Al Shalhoub 88), Al Dawsari, Milesi, Al Faraj (Al Qahtani 68), Al Abed, Khribin (Fallatah 62). *Sent off: Al Dawsari 79.*

JAPAN

2017 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kawasaki (C)	34	21	9	4	71	32	72
Kashima	34	23	3	8	53	31	72
Cerezo	34	19	6	9	65	43	63
Kashiwa	34	18	8	8	49	33	62
Yokohama	34	17	8	9	45	36	59
Jubilo	34	16	10	8	50	30	58
Urawa	34	14	7	13	64	54	49
Sagan	34	13	8	13	41	44	47
Vissel	34	13	5	16	40	45	44
Gamba	34	11	10	13	48	41	43
Consadole	34	12	7	15	39	47	43
Vegalta	34	11	8	15	44	53	41
Tokyo	34	10	10	14	37	42	40
Shimizu	34	8	10	16	36	54	34
Sanfrecce	34	8	9	17	32	49	33
Ventforet (R)	34	7	11	16	23	39	32
Albirex (R)	34	7	7	20	28	60	28
Omiya (R)	34	5	10	19	28	60	25

TAIWAN

2017 Championship Final
1st leg - Nov18; 2nd leg - Nov 25
Taipower v Tatung 1-1, 0-0
(agg 1-1, Tatung on away goals)

TAJIKISTAN

2017 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Istiklol (C)	21	17	4	0	64	14	55
Khujand	21	11	4	6	44	22	37
CSKA Pomir	21	8	10	3	19	13	34
Regar-TadAZ	21	6	6	9	22	23	24
Barki Tajik	21	6	6	9	20	27	24
Vakhsh	21	5	7	9	17	28	22
Panjshir[1]	21	5	4	12	25	48	19
Khosilot (R)	21	4	3	14	16	52	15

[1] *Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off*

UZBEKISTAN

2017 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lokomotiv (C)	30	22	4	4	67	20	70
Nasaf	30	20	2	8	58	18	62
Pakhtakor	30	18	5	7	44	28	59
Bunyodkor	30	14	10	6	47	29	52
Navbahor	30	12	10	8	40	37	46
Buxoro	30	13	7	10	42	40	46
Mash'al	30	12	8	10	37	31	44
Olmaliq	30	12	8	10	31	32	44
Kokand 1912	30	11	8	11	42	47	41
Metallurg	30	12	4	14	40	39	40
Qizilqum	30	9	10	11	31	40	37
Dinamo	30	8	8	14	21	35	32
Sogdiana	30	8	7	15	33	51	31
Shurtan	30	8	3	19	28	52	27
Neftchi Fer'a	30	6	9	15	23	48	27
Obod	30	2	3	25	15	52	9

VIETNAM

2017 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Quang Nam (C)	26	13	9	4	46	32	48
Thanh Hoa	26	13	9	4	44	29	48
Ha Noi	26	12	10	4	54	31	46
T Quang Ninh	26	12	7	7	42	34	43
Sai Gon	26	11	10	5	40	29	43
Sanna K Hoa	26	11	8	7	38	37	41
Hai Phong	26	11	5	10	35	33	38
Song Lam NA	26	8	10	8	36	36	34
Da Nang	26	8	9	9	36	34	33
Hoang Anh GL	26	9	3	14	34	43	30
Binh Duong	26	6	12	8	34	30	30
Ho Chi Minh C	26	6	7	13	29	46	25
Can Tho	26	5	7	14	32	50	22
Long An (R)	26	2	4	20	30	66	10

OCEANIA

SOLOMON ISLANDS

2017 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S Warriors (C)	14	12	0	2	46	21	36
Marist	14	10	2	2	32	14	32
Kossa	14	7	4	3	38	26	25
Henderson Eels	14	7	3	4	39	21	24
Malaita Kingz	14	4	2	8	29	34	14
Western Utd	14	4	0	10	28	43	12
Guadalcanal	14	4	0	10	18	45	12
Kakamora	14	2	1	11	18	44	7

KEY TO TABLES (C) = champions; (R) = relegated; (Q) = enter next stage; (EL) = enter Europa League

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GOALKEEPERS
40 Raphael **ADICEAM** (27) 03.07.90
30 Gauthier **BANAZIAK** (20) 25.05.97
16 Jean-Christophe **BOUET** (34) 21.07.83
1 Regis **GURTNER** (31) 08.12.86

DEFENDERS
3 Khaled **ADENON** (Ben) (32) 28.07.85
35 Danilo **AVELAR** (Bra) (28) 09.06.89
24 Mathieu **BODMER** (35) 22.11.82
25 Issa **CISSOKHO** (Sen) (32) 23.02.85
12 Bakaye **DIBASSY** (Mli) (28) 11.08.89
19 Oualid **EL HAJJAM** (26) 19.02.91
2 Prince-Desir **GOUANO** (24) 24.12.93
23 Julien **IELSCH** (34) 05.03.83

MIDFIELDERS
20 Sekou **BARADJI** (31) 24.04.86
10 Emmanuel **BOURGAUD** (30) 25.10.87
21 Charly **CHARRIER** (31) 27.05.86
11 Jean-Luc **DOMPE** (22) 12.08.95
8 Guessouma **FOFANA** (25) 17.12.92
7 Harrison **MANZALA** (DRC) (23) 06.03.94
6 Thomas **MONCONDUIT** (26) 10.02.91
26 Guy **NGOSSO** (Cam) (32) 11.01.85
17 Madih **TALAL** (20) 17.08.97
34 Bongani **ZUNGU** (SAf) (25) 09.10.92

FORWARDS
13 Quentin **CORNETTE** (23) 17.01.94
37 Serge **GAKPE** (Tog) (30) 07.05.87
18 Georges **GOPE-FENEPEJ** (NC) (29) 23.10.88
14 Gael **KAKUTA** (DRC) (26) 21.06.91
29 Seybou **KOITA** (Ngr) (23) 15.04.94
15 Moussa **KONATE** (Sen) (24) 03.04.93
9 Brighton **LABEAU** (23) 15.04.94
4 **NATHAN** (Bra) (21) 13.03.96
28 Lacina **TRAORE** (IvC) (27) 20.08.90

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Christophe **PELISSIER** (52) 05.10.65

ANGERS

GOALKEEPERS
30 Alexandre **LETELLIER** (27) 11.12.90
40 Anthony **MANDREA** (21) 25.12.96
16 Mathieu **MICHEL** (26) 04.09.91

DEFENDERS
3 Yoann **ANDREU** (28) 03.05.89
25 Abdoulaye **BAMBA** (IvC) (27) 25.04.90
17 Saliou **CISS** (Sen) (28) 15.09.89
29 Vincent **MANCEAU** (28) 10.07.89
4 Mateo **PAVLOVIC** (Cro) (27) 09.06.90
26 Mehdi **TAHRAT** (Alg) (27) 24.01.90
24 Romain **THOMAS** (29) 12.06.88
8 Ismael **TRAORE** (IvC) (31) 18.08.86

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15 Pierrick **CAPELLE** (30) 15.04.87
12 Lassana **COULIBALY** (Mli) (21) 10.04.96
23 Angelo **FULGINI** (21) 20.08.96
5 Thomas **MANGANI** (30) 29.04.87
21 Loic **PUYO** (29) 19.12.88
18 Baptiste **SANTAMARIA** (22) 09.03.95
20 Flavien **TAIT** (24) 02.02.93

FORWARDS
9 Enzo **CRIVELLI** (22) 06.02.95
19 Baptiste **GUILLAUME** (Blg) (22) 16.06.95
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14 Billy **KETKEOPHOMPHONE** (27) 24.03.90
10 Gilles **SUNU** (26) 30.03.91
7 Karl **TOKO EKAMBI** (Cam) (25) 14.09.92

COACH
Stephane **MOULIN** (50) 04.08.67

BORDEAUX

GOALKEEPERS
1 Benoit **COSTIL** (30) 03.07.87
16 Gaetan **POUSSIN** (18) 13.01.99
30 Jerome **PRIOR** (22) 08.08.95

DEFENDERS
36 Thomas **CARRIQUE** (18) 26.02.99
3 Diego **CONTENTO** (Ger) (27) 01.05.90
2 Milan **GAJIC** (Ser) (21) 28.01.96
4 Vukasin **JOVANOVIC** (Ser) (21) 17.05.96
6 Igor **LEWCZUK** (Pol) (32) 30.05.85
5 **OTAVIO** (Bra) (23) 04.05.94
21 Theo **PELLENARD** (23) 04.03.94
29 Maxime **POUNDJE** (25) 16.08.92
20 Youssouf **SABALY** (24) 05.03.93

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19 Lukas **LERAGER** (Den) (24) 12.07.93
17 Matheus **PEREIRA** (Bra) (19) 25.02.98
18 Jaroslav **PLASIL** (CzR) (35) 05.01.82
13 Younousse **SANKHARE** (Sen) (28) 10.09.89
14 Jeremy **TOULALAN** (34) 10.09.83
23 Valentin **VADA** (Arg) (21) 06.03.96
32 Zaydou **YOUSSEF** (18) 11.07.99

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22 Jonathan **CAFU** (Bra) (26) 10.07.91
12 Nicolas **DE PREVILLE** (26) 08.01.91
11 Francois **KAMANO** (Gui) (21) 01.05.96
24 Gaetan **LABORDE** (23) 03.05.94
7 **MALCOM** (Bra) (20) 26.02.97
15 Alexandre **MENDY** (23) 20.03.94

COACH
Jocelyn **GOURVENNEC** (45) 22.03.72

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30 Brice **SAMBA** (Con) (23) 25.04.94
1 Remy **VERCOUTRE** (37) 26.06.80

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33 Yoel **ARMOUGOM** (19) 05.06.98
28 Damien **DA SILVA** (29) 17.05.88
23 Mouhamadou **DABO** (31) 28.11.86
24 Alexander **DJIKU** (23) 09.08.94
29 Romain **GENEVOIS** (Hai) (30) 28.10.87
21 Frederic **GUILBERT** (23) 24.12.94
3 Florian **LE JONCOUR** (22) 03.02.95
22 Adama **MBENGUE** (Sen) (24) 01.12.93

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13 Christian **KOUAKOU** (IvC) (26) 01.03.91
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26 Ivan **SANTINI** (Cro) (28) 21.05.89

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1 Benjamin **LEROY** (28) 07.04.89
30 Baptiste **REYNET** (27) 28.10.90

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26 Fouad **CHAFIK** (Mor) (31) 16.10.86
4 Papy **DJILOBODJI** (Sen) (29) 01.12.88
5 Oussama **HADDADI** (Tun) (25) 28.01.92
2 Adam **LANG** (Hun) (24) 17.01.93
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19 Valentin **ROSIER** (21) 19.08.96
23 Vincent **RUFLI** (Swi) (29) 22.01.88
27 Cedric **VARRAULT** (37) 30.01.80
18 Cedric **YAMBERE** (CAR) (27) 06.11.90

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20 Romain **AMALFITANO** (28) 27.08.89
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15 Florent **BALMONT** (37) 02.02.80
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28 **XEKA** (Por) (23) 10.11.94

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29 Christophe **KERBRAT** (31) 02.08.86
22 Jonathan **MARTINS PEREIRA** (31) 30.01.86
3 Pedro **REBOCHO** (Por) (22) 23.01.95
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27 Franck **TABANOU** (28) 30.01.89

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10 Nicolas **BENEZET** (26) 24.02.91
7 Ludovic **BLAS** (19) 31.12.97
24 Marcus **COCO** (21) 24.06.96
8 Lucas **DEAUX** (29) 26.12.88
5 Moustapha **DIALLO** (Sen) (31) 14.05.86
17 Etienne **DIDOT** (34) 24.07.83
20 Felix **EBOA EBOA** (Cam) (20) 19.04.97
26 Thibault **GIRESSE** (36) 25.05.81
18 Lebogang **PHIRI** (SAf) (23) 09.11.94

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32 Karim **ACHAHBAR** (Mor) (21) 03.01.96
23 Jimmy **BRIAND** (32) 02.05.85
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14 Sullivan **MARTINET** (21) 01.07.96
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19 Yannis **SALIBUR** (26) 24.01.91
21 Marcus **THURAM** (20) 06.08.97

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1 Adam **JAKUBECH** (Slk) (20) 02.01.97
30 Herve **KOFFI** (BuF) (21) 16.10.96
16 Mike **MAIGNAN** (22) 03.07.95

DEFENDERS
3 Junior **ALONSO** (Par) (24) 09.02.93
14 Kouadio **DABILA** (IvC) (20) 01.01.97
15 Edgar **IE** (Por) (23) 01.05.94
2 Kevin **MALCUIT** (26) 31.07.91
27 Hamza **MENDYL** (Mor) (20) 21.10.97
5 Adama **SOUMAORO** (25) 18.06.92

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26 Fares **BAHLOULI** (22) 08.04.95
25 Fode **BALLO-TOURE** (20) 03.01.97
21 Yves **BISSOUMA** (Mli) (21) 30.08.96
- Imad **FARAJ** (18) 11.02.99
20 Thiago **MAIA** (Bra) (20) 23.03.97
23 Thiago **MENDES** (Bra) (25) 15.03.92
29 Kouame **N'GUESSAN** (21) 17.12.96
17 Valere **POLLET** (20) 27.06.97
32 Boubakary **SOUMARE** (18) 27.02.99

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11 Luiz **ARAUJO** (Bra) (21) 02.06.96
10 Yassine **BENZIA** (Alg) (23) 08.09.94
7 Anwar **EL GHAZI** (Hol) (22) 03.05.95
19 Nicolas **PEPE** (22) 29.05.95
9 Ezequiel **PONCE** (Arg) (20) 29.03.97
34 Scotty **SADZOUTE** (19) 29.04.98

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Marcelo **BIELSA** (Chl) (62) 21.07.55

LYON

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30 Mathieu **GORGELIN** (27) 05.08.90
1 Anthony **LOPES** (Por) (27) 01.10.90
16 Lucas **MOCIO** (23) 11.05.94

DEFENDERS
5 Mouctar **DIAKHABY** (21) 19.12.96
20 Fernando **MARCAL** (Bra) (28) 19.02.89
6 **MARCELO** (Bra) (30) 20.05.87
22 Ferland **MENDY** (22) 08.06.95
15 Jeremy **MOREL** (33) 02.04.84
4 **RAFAEL** (Bra) (27) 09.07.90
23 Kenny **TETE** (Hol) (22) 09.10.95
2 Mapou **YANGA-MBIWA** (28) 15.05.89

MIDFIELDERS
8 Houssem **AOUAR** (19) 30.06.98
24 Pape **DIOP** (Sen) (20) 08.08.97
12 Jordan **FERRI** (25) 12.03.92
7 Clement **GRENIER** (26) 07.01.91
28 Tanguy **NDOMBELE** (21) 28.12.96
33 Elisha **OWUSU** (20) 07.11.97
29 Lucas **TOUSART** (20) 29.04.97

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GOALKEEPERS
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30 Steve **MANDANDA** (32) 28.03.85
16 Yohann **PELE** (35) 04.11.82

DEFENDERS
- Aymen **ABDENNOUR** (Tun) (28) 06.08.89
18 Jordan **AMAVI** (23) 09.03.94
12 Henri **BEDIMO** (Cam) (33) 04.06.84
3 **DORIA** (Bra) (23) 08.11.94
24 Rod **FANNI** (36) 06.12.81
4 Boubacar **KAMARA** (18) 23.11.99
23 Adil **RAMI** (32) 27.12.85
6 **ROLANDO** (Por) (32) 31.08.85
2 Hiroki **SAKAI** (Jap) (27) 12.04.90
13 Gregory **SERTIC** (Cro) (28) 05.08.89

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27 Maxime **LOPEZ** (20) 04.12.97
19 **LUIZ GUSTAVO** (Bra) (30) 23.07.87
5 Lucas **OCAMPOS** (Arg) (23) 11.07.94
10 Dimitri **PAYET** (30) 29.03.87
8 Morgan **SANSON** (23) 18.08.94
26 Florian **THAUVIN** (24) 26.01.93
29 Andre-Frank **ZAMBO ANGUISSA** (Cam) (22) 16.11.95

FORWARDS
28 Valere **GERMAIN** (27) 17.04.90
11 Kostas **MITROGLOU** (Gre) (29) 12.03.88
14 Clinton **NJIE** (Cam) (24) 15.08.93
33 Yusuf **SARI** (19) 20.11.98
17 Bouna **SARR** (Gui) (25) 31.01.92

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Rudi **GARCIA** (53) 20.02.64

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30 Quentin **BEUNARDEAU** (23) 27.02.94
1 Thomas **DIDILLON** (22) 28.11.95
16 Eiji **KAWASHIMA** (Jap) (34) 20.03.83

DEFENDERS
32 Benoit **ASSOU-EKOTTO** (Cam) (33) 24.03.84
25 Ivan **BALLIU** (Spa) (25) 01.01.92
- Nicolas **BASIN** (19) 22.07.98
4 Milan **BISEVAC** (Ser) (34) 31.08.83
3 Fallou **DIAGNE** (Sen) (28) 14.08.89
27 Theodore **EFOUBA** (Cam) (20) 05.05.97
20 Lemouya **GOUDIABY** (Sen) (20) 09.01.97
21 Moussa **NIAKHATE** (21) 08.03.96
23 Chris **PHILIPPS** (Lux) (23) 08.03.94
28 Jonathan **RIVIEREZ** (28) 18.05.89
12 Matthieu **UDOL** (21) 20.03.96
2 Philipp **WOLLSCHEID** (Ger) (28) 06.03.89

MIDFIELDERS
26 **CAFU** (Por) (24) 26.02.93
24 Renaud **COHADE** (33) 29.09.84
17 Mathieu **DOSSEVI** (Tog) (29) 12.02.88
- Lilian **FOURNIER** (19) 18.05.98
8 Yann **JOUFFRE** (33) 23.07.84
33 Youssef **MAZIZ** (19) 24.06.98
19 Florent **MOLLET** (26) 19.11.91
5 Geronimo **POBLETE** (Arg) (24) 02.01.93

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10 Brian **FERNANDEZ** (Arg) (23) 26.09.94
13 Ablie **JALLOW** (Gam) (19) 14.11.98
14 Ibrahima **NIANE** (Sen) (18) 11.03.99
11 Opa **NGUETTE** (23) 08.07.94
29 Emmanuel **RIVIERE** (27) 03.03.90
9 Nolan **ROUX** (29) 01.03.88
18 Vincent **THILL** (Lux) (17) 04.02.00

COACH
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MONACO

GOALKEEPERS
40 Loic **BADIASHIKE** (19) 05.02.98
16 Diego **BENAGLIO** (Swi) (34) 08.09.83
1 Danijel **SUBASIC** (Cro) (33) 27.10.84
30 Seydou **SY** (Sen) (22) 12.12.95

DEFENDERS
25 Kamil **GLIK** (Pol) (29) 03.02.88
5 **JEMERSON** (Bra) (25) 24.08.92
6 **JORGE** (Bra) (21) 28.03.96
4 Terence **KONGOLO** (Hol) (23) 14.02.94
35 Kevin **N'DORAM** (21) 22.01.96
24 Andrea **RAGGI** (Ita) (33) 24.06.84
19 Djibril **SIDIBE** (25) 29.07.92
38 Almamy **TOURE** (Mli) (21) 28.04.96

MIDFIELDERS
26 Gabriel **BOSCHILIA** (Bra) (21) 05.03.96
2 **FABINHO** (Bra) (24) 23.10.93
27 Thomas **LEMAR** (22) 12.11.95
20 Rony **LOPES** (Por) (22) 28.12.95
18 Soualiho **MEITE** (23) 17.03.94
8 Joao **MOUTINHO** (Por) (31) 08.09.86
17 Youri **TIELEMANS** (Blg) (20) 07.05.97
28 Adama **TRAORE** (Mli) (22) 28.06.95

FORWARDS
14 Keita **BALDE** (Sen) (22) 08.03.95
11 Guido **CARRILLO** (Arg) (26) 25.05.91
15 Adama **DIAKHABY** (21) 05.07.96
9 Radamel **FALCAO** (Col) (31) 10.02.86
7 Rachid **GHEZZAL** (Alg) (25) 09.05.92
10 Stevan **JOVETIC** (Mne) (28) 02.11.89
22 Jordi **MBOULA** (Spa) (18) 16.03.99

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Leonardo **JARDIM** (Por) (43) 01.08.74

MONTPELLIER

GOALKEEPERS
50 Dimitry **BERTAUD** (19) 06.06.98
40 Benjamin **LECOMTE** (26) 26.04.91
1 Laurent **PIONNIER** (35) 24.05.82

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2 Ruben **AGUILAR** (24) 26.04.93
3 Daniel **CONGRE** (32) 05.04.85
31 Nicolas **COZZA** (18) 08.01.99
4 Vitorino **HILTON** (Bra) (40) 13.09.77
5 Pedro **MENDES** (Por) (27) 01.10.90
23 Nordi **MUKIELE** (20) 01.11.97
26 Morgan **POATY** (20) 15.07.97
12 Lukas **POKORNY** (CzR) (24) 05.07.93
21 William **REMY** (26) 04.04.91
24 Jerome **ROUSSILLON** (24) 06.01.93

MIDFIELDERS
20 Keagan **DOLLY** (SAf) (24) 22.02.93
9 Jonathan **IKONE** (19) 02.05.98
7 Paul **LASNE** (28) 16.01.89
27 Facundo **PIRIZ** (Uru) (27) 27.03.90
6 Junior **SAMBIA** (21) 07.09.96
22 Killian **SANSON** (20) 07.06.97
28 Stephane **SESSEGNON** (Ben) (33) 01.06.84
13 Ellyes **SKHIRI** (Tun) (22) 10.05.95

FORWARDS
11 Kevin **BERIGAUD** (29) 09.05.88
19 Souleymane **CAMARA** (Sen) (35) 22.12.82
18 Isaac **MBENZA** (Blg) (21) 08.03.96
29 Casimir **NINGA** (Chd) (24) 17.05.93
17 Jeremie **PORSAN-CLEMENTE** (20) 16.12.97
14 Giovanni **SIO** (IvC) (28) 31.03.89

COACH
Michel **DER ZAKARIAN** (Arm) (54) 18.02.63

NANTES

GOALKEEPERS
40 Quentin **BRAAT** (20) 06.07.97
1 Maxime **DUPE** (24) 04.03.93
16 Alexandre **OLLIERO** (21) 15.02.96
30 Ciprian **TATARUSANU** (Rom) (31) 09.02.86

DEFENDERS
2 David **ALCIBIADE** (26) 26.09.91
12 Chidozie **AWAZIEM** (Nga) (20) 01.01.97
3 Diego **CARLOS** (Bra) (24) 15.03.93
5 Koffi **DJIDJI** (IvC) (25) 30.11.92
15 Leo **DUBOIS** (23) 14.09.94
25 Enock **KWATENG** (20) 09.04.97
6 Lucas **LIMA** (Bra) (26) 10.10.91
13 Wilfried **MOIMBE** (29) 18.10.88
4 Nicolas **PALLOIS** (30) 19.09.87
17 Anthony **WALONGWA** (DRC) (24) 15.10.93

MIDFIELDERS
24 Alexis **ALEGUE** (Cam) (21) 23.12.96
29 Najib **GANDI** (23) 23.06.94
20 Andrei **GIROTTO** (25) 17.02.92
7 Jules **ILOKI** (25) 14.01.92
11 Alex **KACANIKLIC** (Swe) (26) 13.08.91
23 Joris **KAYEMBE** (Blg) (23) 08.08.94
21 Rene **KRHIN** (Sln) (27) 21.05.90
33 Samuel **MOUTOUSSAMY** (21) 12.08.96
28 Valentin **RONGIER** (23) 07.12.94
8 Adrien **THOMASSON** (24) 10.12.93
19 Abdoulaye **TOURE** (23) 03.03.94

FORWARDS
10 Yacine **BAMMOU** (Mor) (26) 11.09.91
28 Kalifa **COULIBALY** (Mli) (26) 21.08.91
14 Yassine **EL GHANASSY** (Blg) (27) 12.07.90
34 Randal **KOLO** (19) 05.12.98
22 Prejuce **NAKOULMA** (BuF) (30) 21.04.87
- Santy **N'GOM** (24) 07.03.93
9 Emiliano **SALA** (Arg) (27) 31.10.90

COACH
Claudio **RANIERI** (Ita) (66) 20.10.51

NICE

GOALKEEPERS
40 Walter **BENITEZ** (Arg) (24) 19.03.93
30 Yoan **CARDINALE** (23) 27.03.94
50 Yannis **CLEMENTIA** (20) 05.07.97
16 Simon **POUPLIN** (32) 28.05.85

DEFENDERS
15 Patrick **BURNER** (21) 11.04.96
12 Racine **COLY** (Sen) (22) 08.12.95
31 **DANTE** (Bra) (34) 18.10.83
24 Christophe **JALLET** (34) 31.10.83
20 Maxime **LE MARCHAND** (28) 10.11.89
3 Gautier **LLORIS** (22) 18.07.95
4 **MARLON** (Bra) (22) 07.09.95
23 Malang **SARR** (Sen) (18) 23.01.99
2 Arnaud **SOUQUET** (25) 12.02.92

MIDFIELDERS
25 Wylan **CYPRIEN** (22) 28.01.95
26 Vincent **KOZIELLO** (22) 28.10.95
22 Arnaud **LUSAMBA** (DRC) (20) 04.01.97
35 Hicham **MAHOU** (18) 02.07.99
8 Pierre **LEES-MELOU** (24) 25.05.93
27 Jean-Victor **MAKENGO** (19) 12.06.98
19 Vincent **MARCEL** (20) 09.04.97
21 Nampalys **MENDY** (25) 23.06.92
7 Allan **SAINT-MAXIMIN** (20) 12.03.97
6 Jean Michael **SERI** (IvC) (26) 19.07.91
10 Wesley **SNEIJDER** (Hol) (33) 09.06.84
11 Bassem **SRARFI** (Tun) (20) 25.06.97
5 Adrien **TAMEZE** (Cam) (23) 04.11.94
18 Remi **WALTER** (22) 26.04.95

FORWARDS
9 Mario **BALOTELLI** (Ita) (27) 12.08.90
33 Ignatius **GANAGO** (Cam) (18) 16.02.99
14 Alassane **PLEA** (24) 10.03.93

COACH
Lucien **FAVRE** (Swi) (60) 02.11.57

PSG

GOALKEEPERS
16 Alphonse **AREOLA** (24) 27.02.93
40 Remy **DESCAMPS** (21) 25.06.96
1 Kevin **TRAPP** (Ger) (27) 08.07.90

DEFENDERS
32 Dani **ALVES** (Bra) (34) 06.05.83
17 Yuri **BERCHICHE** (Spa) (27) 10.02.90
31 Alec **GEORGEN** (19) 17.09.98
3 Presnel **KIMPEMBE** (22) 13.08.95
20 Layvin **KURZAWA** (25) 04.09.92
5 **MARQUINHOS** (Bra) (23) 14.05.94
12 Thomas **MEUNIER** (Blg) (26) 12.09.91
2 Thiago **SILVA** (Bra) (33) 22.09.84

MIDFIELDERS
21 Hatem **BEN ARFA** (30) 07.03.87
35 Antoine **BERNEDE** (18) 26.05.99
11 Angel **DI MARIA** (Arg) (29) 14.02.88
23 Julian **DRAXLER** (Ger) (24) 20.09.93
18 Giovani **LO CELSO** (Arg) (21) 09.04.96
7 Lucas **MOURA** (Bra) (25) 13.08.92
8 Thiago **MOTTA** (Ita) (35) 28.08.82
24 Christopher **NKUNKU** (20) 14.11.97
27 Javier **PASTORE** (Arg) (28) 20.06.89
25 Adrien **RABIOT** (22) 03.04.95
6 Marco **VERRATTI** (Ita) (25) 05.11.92

FORWARDS
9 Edinson **CAVANI** (Uru) (30) 14.02.87
29 Kylian **MBAPPE** (19) 20.12.98
10 **NEYMAR** (Bra) (25) 05.02.92

COACH
Unai **EMERY** (Spa) (46) 03.11.71

RENNES

GOALKEEPERS
1 Abdoulaye **DIALLO** (Sen) (25) 30.03.92
30 Edvinas **GERTMONAS** (Lit) (21) 01.06.96
40 Tomas **KOUBEK** (CzR) (25) 26.08.92
16 Rais **M'BOLHI** (Alg) (31) 25.04.86

DEFENDERS
24 Ludovic **BAAL** (31) 24.05.86
15 Ramy **BENSEBAINI** (Alg) (22) 16.04.95
29 Romain **DANZE** (31) 03.07.86
25 Afonso **FIGUEIREDO** (Por) (24) 06.01.93
- Jeremy **GELIN** (20) 24.04.97
5 Joris **GNAGNON** (IvC) (20) 13.01.97
17 Faitout **MAOUASSA** (19) 06.07.98
4 **MEXER** (Moz) (29) 08.09.88
33 Gerzino **NYAMSI** (20) 22.01.97
27 Hamari **TRAORE** (Mli) (25) 27.01.92
2 Mehdi **ZEFFANE** (Alg) (25) 19.05.92

MIDFIELDERS
18 Morgan **AMALFITANO** (32) 20.03.85
21 Benjamin **ANDRE** (27) 03.08.90
14 Benjamin **BOURIGEAUD** (23) 14.01.94
28 Yoann **GOURCUFF** (31) 11.07.86
23 Adrien **HUNOU** (23) 19.01.94
35 Nicolas **JANVIER** (19) 11.08.98
8 Wahbi **KHAZRI** (Tun) (26) 08.02.91
12 James **LEA SILIKI** (21) 12.06.96
26 Sanjin **PRCIC** (Bos) (24) 20.11.93
38 Sebastien **SALLES LAMONGE** (21) 28.01.96
7 Ismaila **SARR** (Sen) (19) 25.02.98
11 Brandon **THOMAS** (Spa) (22) 04.02.95
22 Sabri **TOUFIQUI** (20) 30.03.97

FORWARDS
9 Firmin **MUBELE** (DRC) (23) 17.04.94
19 Jordan **TELL** (20) 10.06.97

COACH
Sabri **LAMOUCHI** (46) 09.11.71

SAINT-ETIENNE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Anthony **MAISONNIAL** (19) 23.03.98
30 Jessy **MOULIN** (31) 13.01.86
16 Stephane **RUFFIER** (31) 27.09.86

DEFENDERS
15 Saidy **JANKO** (Swi) (22) 22.10.95
3 Alexandros **KATRANIS** (Gre) (19) 04.05.98
4 Leo **LACROIX** (Swi) (25) 27.02.92
12 Cheikh **M'BENGUE** (Sen) (29) 23.07.88
24 Loic **PERRIN** (32) 07.08.85
29 Ronael **PIERRE-GABRIEL** (19) 13.06.98
19 Florentin **POGBA** (Gui) (27) 19.08.90
11 Gabriel **SILVA** (Bra) (26) 13.05.91
2 Kevin **THEOPHILE-CATHERINE** (28) 28.10.89

MIDFIELDERS
10 Remy **CABELLA** (27) 08.03.90
7 Bryan **DABO** (25) 18.02.92
8 Assane **DIOUSSE** (Sen) (20) 20.09.97
20 **HERNANI** (Bra) (23) 27.03.94
13 Habib **MAIGA** (IvC) (21) 01.01.96
5 Vincent **PAJOT** (27) 19.08.90
33 Kenny **ROCHA SANTOS** (CV) (17) 03.01.00
17 Ole **SELNAES** (Nor) (23) 07.07.94
31 Rayan **SOUICI** (19) 28.02.98

FORWARDS
14 Jonathan **BAMBA** (21) 26.03.96
9 Lois **DIONY** (25) 20.12.92
21 Romain **HAMOUMA** (30) 29.03.87
22 Kevin **MONNET-PAQUET** (29) 19.08.88
23 Alexander **SODERLUND** (Nor) (30) 03.08.87

COACH
Julien **SABLE** (37) 11.09.80

STRASBOURG

GOALKEEPERS
1 Landry **BONNEFOI** (34) 28.09.83
30 Bingourou **KAMARA** (21) 21.10.96
16 Alexandre **OUKIDJA** (Alg) (29) 19.07.88

DEFENDERS
24 Dimitri **FOULQUIER** (24) 23.03.93
26 Bakari **KONE** (BuF) (29) 27.04.88
27 Kenny **LALA** (26) 03.10.91
12 Kader **MANGANE** (Sen) (34) 23.03.83
4 Pablo **MARTINEZ** (28) 21.02.89
3 Abdallah **NDOUR** (Sen) (24) 20.12.93
21 Yoann **SALMIER** (25) 21.11.92
22 Ernest **SEKA** (30) 22.06.87

MIDFIELDERS
8 Jean-Eudes **AHOLOU** (IvC) (23) 20.03.94
10 Benjamin **CORGNET** (30) 06.04.87
17 Anthony **GONCALVES** (31) 06.03.86
6 Jeremy **GRIMM** (Swi) (30) 27.03.87
11 Dimitri **LIENARD** (29) 13.02.88
28 Jonas **MARTIN** (27) 09.04.90
5 Vincent **NOGUEIRA** (29) 16.01.88
7 Ihsan **SACKO** (20) 19.07.97

FORWARDS
19 Stephane **BAHOKEN** (Cam) (25) 28.05.92
13 Jeremy **BLAYAC** (34) 13.06.83
29 Nuno **DA COSTA** (CV) (26) 10.02.91
9 Idriss **SAADI** (Alg) (25) 08.02.92
20 Martin **TERRIER** (20) 04.03.97

COACH
Thierry **LAUREY** (53) 17.02.64

TOULOUSE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Mauro **GOICOECHEA** (Uru) (29) 27.03.88
40 Alban **LAFONT** (18) 23.01.99
16 Marc **VIDAL** (26) 03.06.91

DEFENDERS
2 Kelvin **AMIAN ADOU** (19) 08.02.98
5 Issa **DIOP** (20) 09.01.97
18 Steven **FORTES** (CV) (25) 17.04.92
6 Christopher **JULLIEN** (24) 22.03.93
13 Clement **MICHELIN** (20) 11.05.97
29 Francois **MOUBANDJE** (Swi) (27) 21.06.90
12 Issiaga **SYLLA** (Gui) (23) 01.01.94
20 Steeve **YAGO** (BuF) (25) 16.12.92

MIDFIELDERS
27 Alexis **BLIN** (21) 16.09.96
23 Yann **BODIGER** (22) 09.02.95
26 Quentin **BOISGARD** (20) 17.03.97
4 Yannick **CAHUZAC** (32) 18.01.85
21 Jimmy **DURMAZ** (Swe) (28) 22.03.89
25 Giannelli **IMBULA** (25) 12.09.92
7 Zinedine **MACHACH** (21) 05.01.96
17 Ibrahim **SANGARE** (IvC) (20) 02.12.97
19 **SOMALIA** (Bra) (29) 28.09.88

FORWARDS
10 Andy **DELORT** (26) 09.10.91
15 Max **GRADEL** (IvC) (30) 30.11.87
8 Corentin **JEAN** (22) 15.07.95
33 Driss **KHALID** (Mor) (18) 07.02.99
39 Yaya **SANOGO** (24) 27.01.93
11 Ola **TOIVONEN** (Swe) (31) 03.07.86

COACH
Pascal **DUPRAZ** (55) 19.09.62

TROYES

GOALKEEPERS
30 Mamadou **SAMASSA** (Mli) (27) 16.02.90
1 Erwin **ZELAZNY** (26) 22.09.91

DEFENDERS
2 Jeremy **CORDOVAL** (27) 12.01.90
12 Mathieu **DEPLAGNE** (26) 01.10.91
3 **GABRIEL** (Bra) (20) 19.12.97
24 Jimmy **GIRAUDON** (25) 16.01.92
22 Christophe **HERELLE** (25) 22.08.92
17 Johann **OBIANG** (Gab) (24) 05.07.93
23 Charles **TRAORE** (Mli) (25) 01.01.92
4 Oswaldo **VIZCARRONDO** (Ven) (33) 31.05.84

MIDFIELDERS
6 Karim **AZAMOUM** (27) 17.01.90
14 Francois **BELLUGOU** (30) 25.04.87
18 Chaouki **BEN SAADA** (Tun) (33) 01.07.84
27 Alois **CONFAIS** (21) 07.09.96
8 Stephane **DARBION** (33) 22.03.84
19 Tristan **DINGOME** (26) 17.02.91
13 Saif **KHAOUI** (Tun) (22) 27.04.95
10 Benjamin **NIVET** (40) 02.01.77
28 Bryan **PELE** (25) 25.03.92
- Jonathan **TINHAN** (28) 01.06.89

FORWARDS
11 Raphael **CACERES** (30) 01.09.87
29 Samuel **GRANDSIR** (21) 14.08.96
26 Adama **NIANE** (Mli) (24) 16.06.93
25 Mamadou **SISSAKO** (21) 20.04.96
9 **SUK** Hyun-jun (SKo) (26) 29.06.91

COACH
Jean-Louis **GARCIA** (55) 20.09.62

(Ages as of 29.12.17)

World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

JULY 30, 1966, WEMBLEY: WORLD CUP

England 4 West Germany 2

Geoff Hurst's hat-trick and a controversial decision by an Azerbaijani linesman seal English football's greatest moment

Challenge...Geoff Hurst competes with West Germany goalkeeper Hans Tilkowski

The last in the series of Great Matches looks back on a game that caused Stuart Shaw to ask in *World Soccer*'s September 1966 edition "whether there has ever been a more dramatic World Cup Final"?

Although Shaw felt that "the Germans looked a little more composed and not quite as nervous as England" in the first half, the interval arrived with the teams level after Helmut Haller and Geoff Hurst had traded goals. However, "the change which came over Germany in the second half was amazing".

Shaw said of Helmut Schon's side after the break: "They were leaden-footed, made an increasing number of elementary errors, while England were racing about with the enthusiasm of two-year-olds."

But after Martin Peters had scored what looked like a winner for the hosts, "England played their worst football of the game" and Wolfgang Weber equalised in the last minute.

Then came the decision on which the entire game would turn. "Hurst turned to smash a shot onto the underside of the bar" which crashed down towards the goal line – although on which side of the line it landed was not immediately clear – and the ball was headed behind by defender Willi Schulz. "England claimed a goal. Germany claimed a corner," recorded Shaw. "The referee went over to the linesman [Azerbaijan's Tofiq Bahramov] and a goal was agreed upon."

Hurst then added a fourth to end a tournament that was described by Leslie Vernon as having "a greater impact on a larger number of people than any other sporting event in history". WS

Winners...(from left) Alan Ball, Bobby Charlton and skipper Bobby Moore

Referee: Dienst (Swi)

KEY MOMENTS

Ahead...Martin Peters (far left) scores

12min Ray Wilson's clearance falls to Helmut Haller, whose shot beats England keeper Gordon Banks. **0-1**

18min Bobby Moore floats a free-kick into the West German penalty area, where Geoff Hurst rises unchallenged to head home. **1-1**

78min Hurst's deflected shot finds Martin Peters, who scores from eight yards out. **2-1**

89min After a free-kick strikes the England wall, Sigfried Held's follow-up rebounds to Wolfgang Weber, who pokes the ball home. **2–2**

Drama...Weber equalises

95min Bobby Charlton's shot hits a German post.

101min Hurst swivels and crashes Alan Ball's cross onto the underside of the German bar. After the ball bounces down and is cleared, the referee, Gottfried Dienst, consults linesman Tofiq Bahramov and decides that the ball has crossed the line. **3-2**

120min With Germany's defenders pushing forward in search of a last-minute equaliser, and a number of fans on the pitch, Moore picks out the unmarked Hurst with a long pass and he beats keeper Hans Tilkowski with a thumping shot. **4-2**

Goal...Hurst (out of picture) gets the third

NEXT MONTH ISSUE ON SALE JANUARY 26

“Art of Football bring out
the beauty in the game's most
memorable moments” Copa90

“Art of Football capture classic
moments in a vibrant,
contemporary style” The Guardian

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Hitesh Ratna, Editor, FourFourTwo

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that is designed to emotionally connect
real fans to the biggest moments
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ESPN Soccer Analyst

Matt Martin
MLS Timbers
Scouting Director

Lee Fraser
Newcastle United
Technical Scout

John Print
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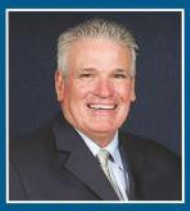
Sky Andrew
FIFA Agent



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SMWW President

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